









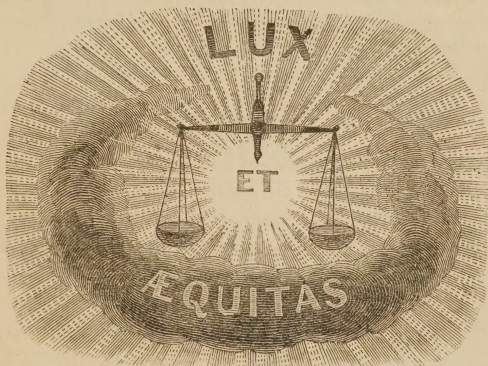
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# HOW SHALL MAN BE JUST WITH GOD?

BY

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The Presbyterian Publication Committee.

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## HOW SHALL MAN BE JUST WITH GOD?

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I. *The importance and difficulty of the inquiry, How man can be justified.*

THE question "How shall man be justified with God," (Job xxv. 4.) proposed by an Eastern Sage, may be regarded as an inquiry by *man*—*by human nature*. It expresses the deep workings of the human soul in all ages, on one of the most important and difficult of all subjects. The question means, How shall man be regarded and treated as righteous by his Maker? What methods shall he take to secure such treatment? What can he do, if any thing, to commend himself to the favourable regards of a holy God? What can he do, if any thing, to make amends for the past? What can he do, if any thing, to turn away future wrath? Can he vindicate himself before the Eternal Throne, for what he has done? If not, can he see how it is consistent for God to treat him as righteous? These questions meet us everywhere, and enter into and mould all the forms of religion on earth. The inquiry, as illustrating and expressing the feelings of human nature, may be considered with reference to two points:—its importance, and its difficulty.

I. *The importance of the inquiry.*

(1.) Its importance will be seen by this consideration—*No one can be saved unless he is just, or righteous, in the sight of God.* Unless there is some way, by which God can consistently regard and treat us as just or righteous, it is impossible to believe that we can enter heaven when we die.

Unless man is personally so holy that he cannot be charged with guilt; or can justify himself by denying or disproving the charge of guilt; or can vindicate himself by showing that his conduct is right; or can appropriate to himself the merit of another as if it were his own, no one can believe,—no one does believe—that he can enter heaven. Probably there is no conviction of the human mind more deep and universal than this, and every man, whether conscious to himself of acting on it or not, makes it elementary in his practical belief. If any one is disposed to call this proposition in question, or if he is not conscious of acting on it, he will see that it must be true, by looking at it for a single moment. The proposition is, that no man can be saved unless he is just, or righteous, in the sight of God. Can God save a wicked man *as such* and on account of his wickedness? Can he hold him up to the universe as one who ought to be saved? Can he take the profane man, the scoffer, the adulterer and the murderer, to heaven, and proclaim himself as their patron and friend? Can he connect a life of open wickedness with the rewards of eternal glory? Nothing can be more clear than that if a man is made happy forever in heaven, there will be some good reason for it, and that reason cannot be that he was regarded as an unrighteous person. There will be a fitness and propriety in his being saved; there will be some reason why it will be proper for God to regard and treat him as righteous.

This view, which is perhaps sufficiently obvious, may be illustrated by a reference to a human government. No just government could become the patron and friend of the pirate and the murderer, or bestow its rewards on one who, in all respects, deserved to meet the penalty of the laws. On this belief also, every man acts in reference to his own salvation. Each one has a firm conviction that no man can be saved unless he is just in the sight of God. A man when he thinks of being saved, always either thinks that he has kept the law



of God; or that he has a good excuse for not complying with it; or that he can make reparation by penances, pilgrimages, sacrifices, or fastings; or that he can appropriate to himself the merit of another. He never thinks of finding favour with God *as* a transgressor, or on account of his crimes; he never supposes that his iniquity can be the foundation of his salvation. God made the human soul, and he so made it, that it never *could* believe that he would save a man *because* he was wicked, or unless there was some way in which he could be regarded and treated as righteous.

(2.) Secondly, the importance of the inquiry is seen from the testimony of man everywhere. Man is *apparently* greatly indifferent to religion, and it often seems impossible to arouse his attention to the great and momentous questions connected with it. But, taking the race together, he is not so indifferent to the subject as he appears, and could we know all the secret thoughts and feelings of each individual, we should find that his indifference is often in appearance only. There are workings of the soul which are carefully excluded from public view. There are thoughts, which every man has, of which he would not wish others to know. There are deep, agitating, protracted questionings resulting in settled conviction, or tossing the soul upon a restless sea, which men would wish to hide from their best friends. There is often a deep interest in a man's mind on the subject of religion, when his whole soul seems to the world torpid and inactive, or when he would repel your inquiries, or when he would seem as "calm as a summer's morning."

A very slight acquaintance with the human mind, or with the history of opinions, is all that is needful to see the importance which the inquiry, on the subject of justification, has assumed in the view of man.

(a) It was seen in the investigations of ancient philosophers "How shall man be just with God?" was the question which pressed itself on the minds and hearts of the

speakers in the book of Job, and it was a question which was echoed and re-echoed in the whole heathen philosophic world. Many who are profound and patient students on other subjects, often regard investigations on the subject of religion as unworthy their attention. They think them appropriate themes for contending theologians; for disputatious and subtle schoolmen; for the feeble in intellect, or for the dying; but they regard them as having slight claims on a philosophic mind. But would they go and take lessons of the masters of science and of profound thought, they would think differently. Will such men tell us what points of inquiry have most occupied the attention of the intellects of other times? Will they refer to the volumes which contain the results of their investigations of past ages? Will they let Socrates once more speak, and Plato give utterance to his views, and Cicero and Seneca declare what most engrossed their attention? One thing they will find in all the past—one grand absorbing question they will meet with everywhere—one query to which all physical science was made subservient. It was the subject of religion; the question of man's acceptance with God; the grounds of his hope of future blessedness. The real inquiry among thinking men of all ages and lands has been, "How shall man be just with God?"

(b) The same earnest searching we find still in the heathen world. From the recorded views, and the religion of the heathen, we may learn much about man when he utters his sentiments without disguise; and what we find universally among them, we may regard as the language of human nature. Now there is no one thing expressed with more uniformity or more earnestness all over the Pagan world than this question, "How may we be just with God?" It was the foundation of all sacrifices, penances, pilgrimages, self-inflicted mortifications. All these things were intended so to make expiation for sin, or so to appease the anger of

the gods, that they who thus performed the rights of religion, might be regarded and treated as righteous. Take this inquiry away, and their sacrifices and penances would be unmeaning. Take this away, and the earnestness of their religion would soon cease, and, degenerating into an empty form, would of itself soon expire.

(c) There is another method by which we may learn the views of the human soul about the importance of this inquiry. It is by contemplating the soul when under convictions of sin, and reflecting on its prospects about the future world. Then there is no thought so momentous in the view of the mind as this, "How shall a man be just with God?" There are many more persons in this state than is commonly imagined. There is probably no one who reaches the years of mature reflection, before whose mind this inquiry has not at some period assumed an engrossing importance. With almost no danger of error, you may assume of every man that you meet, that his mind either has been, or is now deeply interested on the subject of his salvation, and that in his life there are periods when no subject appears so momentous as this. In his moments of solitary musing, or in a time of bereavement, or under the preaching of the gospel, or when remembered truth seems to come with new-armed power to his soul, or when the recollection of guilt seems recalled to him by some invisible agency, or when lying on a bed of languishing, this great inquiry has come before him, "How may he be justified before his Maker?" How may the guilt of his sins be washed away? How may he be regarded and treated as a righteous man? To those who have been in this state—and who has not been?—it need not be said, that *then* no question seems more momentous than this. In time of revival of religion, the student in a college loses his relish for his ordinary studies, and almost the capacity to pursue them, absorbed in the more important study respecting salvation; the merchant loses his relish for his gains,

engrossed in the greater inquiry how he may obtain everlasting life; the farmer, the mechanic, and the mariner feel that they can hardly pursue their wonted employments, for a more momentous subject has engrossed the soul. The eye may be on a passage in Horace or Livy, but the thought shall be elsewhere; and the hands may be employed in labour, but it shall be performed with a heavy heart, and when toil is pursued almost unconscious of what is done. The calm, fixed, steady, contemplative eye of the student, and the readiness of the man of business to leave his counting room and place himself under religious instruction, show with what intensity this inquiry has seized on the soul. The busy, the studious and the gay often become entirely absorbed in it, and then no honour of scholarship, no amplitude of gain, no brilliancy of pleasure or amusement, seem comparable in value to the solution of the question, "How shall man be just with God?" We need not pause here to consider whether this is a just estimate which the soul thus puts on the magnitude of this subject. We are concerned only in getting at the language of man himself when in his sober moments. It will at least be conceded that in those moments of profound absorbing thought; those moments when men of all classes are willing to turn aside from their usual pursuits; those times when the great inquiry can make the pleasures of the ball-room and the scenes of the splendid amusement, tasteless, and can loosen the hold of the votaries of gold on their gains, and cause the ardent student to turn aside from his books, that then the human mind is as likely as ever to judge correctly of the importance of what has come before it. Yet there is but one sentiment then—that this question absorbs and annihilates all others.

(3.) There is another consideration which shows the importance of this inquiry. It is, that the views that are entertained of justification, modify and shape all the other doctrines of religion. It is the central doctrine in the whole



system, and spreads its influence over every other opinion which man holds, on the subject of salvation. The views entertained on this subject, distinguish respectively the Protestant and the Papal communities; divide Protestants themselves into two great parties, evangelical and non-evangelical; separate heathens from Christians; give form to all the systems of infidelity and Deism, and constitute the peculiarity of every man's individual faith. When it is known definitely what a man thinks on this one point, it may be known whether he is a Papist, or a Protestant; a Christian or an infidel; a heathen or a friend of the Saviour; a formalist or a devoted servant of God. Luther did not say too much when he said of this doctrine of justification, that it was the article on which depended the permanency or ruin of the church, and with a sagacity equal to that of Talleyrand, when from a very slight matter he predicted that the throne of France would be overturned, Luther saw that the doctrine of justification would meet every corruption of the Papacy and eventually overturn the system. The fabric of the Papacy is an ingenious attempt, originated and arranged under the auspices of a higher than a human intellect, though fallen, to delude man with the belief, that there is some other way by which he may be justified with God, than by faith in the Saviour. The whole system of heathenism is an attempt to answer the question, "How man may be justified with God?" The systems of infidels, and of men who are depending on their own morality, or relying on penances and pilgrimages, are another answer which is given to the question.

If the observations now made are correct, it will be conceded that this doctrine has an importance which cannot be over-estimated. If it be so, that no man can be saved who is not justified in the sight of God; that the race everywhere, in the anxious inquiry of sages, in the systems and sacrifices of the heathen, and in the deep working of the soul rendering every other pursuit tasteless and valueless,

has shown its sense of its importance, and that it spreads its influence over every form of belief, the importance of the inquiry will be admitted.

II. The second point proposed to be noticed as preparatory to a consideration of the subject of justification is,—*The difficulty of the inquiry.*

What is the difficulty? Why has the human mind been so much perplexed in relation to it? Why may not God admit man to heaven, and regard and treat him as if he were righteous? These questions can be answered in a single remark, and the whole difficulty may then be seen at a glance. It is, *that man is in fact not righteous.* The difficulty is to see *how God can regard and treat him as if he were.* It is easy to see how *if* he were righteous, God could treat him so, or how he could treat him as a sinner, that is, according to his real character. But how shall he treat him differently from what he deserves, or as if he had a character which it is known he has not? Whatever theories may be embraced by men, or whatever opinions may be entertained on the subject of religion, it is true as a matter of fact that these perplexities have been felt by men, that they have given rise to grave and agitating questions, and that man has not felt that he could give a solution that was wholly satisfactory. There is no inquiry which has taken hold on man everywhere, under all forms of government and opinion, and in every climate and amidst every degree of progress, which has not had some real foundation in the nature of things. The race, in its soberest moments, does not busy itself with trifles, and especially will not allow itself to be troubled and tortured by questions that are of no importance. The difficulty which has been felt on this subject is therefore not imaginary, but from the fact that the inquiry has been so universal, and so beyond the human powers satisfactorily to explain, it is clear that God meant that it should be re-

garded by man as a point to be solved only by divine revelations. The real difficulties in the case, and the state of the human mind in regard to them, may be illustrated by the following observations :—

(1.) There was the impossibility of man's vindicating himself from the charges of guilt brought against him. If he could do this, all would be clear, for God will not condemn the innocent. But it could not be done. These charges were brought in such a way, and enforced in such a manner that man could not so meet them as to escape the conviction of their truth. They are brought, where there is a revelation by God himself in his word; and where there is not, as well as where there is, by conscience. Man is told in the word of God that he is a sinner; his recollection of what he has done, assures him that it is so; the dealings of God with him, convince him that there must be some cause of alienation between himself and his Maker; and every sick bed, and every grave, and every apprehension of future wrath, confirms the conviction. If man were to undertake to convince himself that he is not held to be guilty, the argument could not be derived from the dealings of God with him in this world. It is not easy for a man to satisfy himself that he is not a sinner, when the earth is strewed with the dying and the dead; when his best friends are cut down all around him; when he himself is to die, and when he is so made that he cannot but tremble at the apprehension of the judgment. If one wished to construct an argument to prove that he is not a sinful man, and that man can be just with God, he would desire to be removed to some world where he would not see so many things that seem to be mementoes of human depravity, and so many evidences that his Creator regards him and his fellow-men as guilty. Men have everywhere felt this difficulty. There is no one sentiment in which men more uniformly agree than in this. Every man regards every other man as a sinner, and puts

himself on his defence against him, for his locks, and bolts, and notes, and bonds, and securities all demonstrate this; and every man knows that he himself also is a sinner. There is nothing of which he is better apprised, nothing he believes more firmly than this. There is not a living man that could bear the revelation of his thoughts to others for a single day, and that not merely because others have no right to know what is passing in his mind, but because he feels that they are wrong. Confusion, blushes, shame, and shrinking would diffuse themselves over every assembly, and through every crowded thoroughfare in the streets of a great city, and in every lonely path where strangers should meet strangers, if each one knew that another was surveying closely the thoughts of his heart, and saw what was passing there. If every man felt that his bosom were so transparent that all the workings of his soul could be observed by others, no one would venture out of his chamber; no one would move along the pathways where he might encounter a fellow man; the thronged places of business would be deserted, and our great and crowded cities would become like the cities of the dead. No man would venture, at midnight on the mountain top, or on the lonely prairie, to stretch out his hands to Heaven, and say, "I am pure as the stars that shine upon me, or as the God that made them." So universal is the consciousness of guilt, and so certain does every man feel, in his sober moments, that he cannot vindicate himself before God. *How then shall man be just with God?*

(2.) There is the difficulty which must have been early apparent to men, and which any one can see now, if the guilty were saved, or if they were regarded and treated as righteous. How could this be done? Man does not do it himself, in reference to those who are guilty, and how could God? No father feels that it would be proper to regard and treat an offending child as if he were obedient; no



friend acts thus toward one who professes friendship; and no government acts thus toward its subjects. All order and happiness in a family would cease at once if this were to occur; and government on earth would be unknown. There is a great principle of eternal justice which seems engraved in the convictions of the soul, that every one ought to be treated according to character, and that there *ought* to be a difference in the divine dealings toward the good and the evil. But what if God treats all alike? What if he makes no distinction in regard to character? What if he admits all to favour; punishes no one, and rewards piety and impiety, fraud and honesty, vice and virtue, reverence and blasphemy, alike with the same immortal crown? What if the murder of the innocent, and the highest deed of benevolence were equally a passport to his favour? What if he met the licentious, and those of virgin purity of soul, when they came before him, with the same smile of approbation? Would not the universe feel that he was regardless of character? Would it be possible to correct the impression?

But it will be said, perhaps, might he not pardon the guilty, and the fact of pardon constitute a ground of distinction which the universe would understand? True, if it would be proper to pardon in this state of things. But are there no difficulties attending the subject of pardon? Can it always be done? Can it be done to an unlimited extent? Does a father feel that it is safe and best to adopt it as a universal rule, that he will forgive all his children as often as they may choose to offend him, and to do it without any condition? Any one may easily see the difficulty on this subject. There are thousands of men confined in penitentiaries; many of them are desperate men, regardless of all the laws of heaven and earth. Would it be felt to be safe or proper at once to open their prison doors? Who would wish to be in the neighbourhood when they should

be turned impenitent and unreformed upon the world? If the community is scarcely safe now with all the precautions and guards of justice, what would it be if they were all withdrawn? These difficulties must occur to any one when he asks the question, How can the guilty be justified?

(3.) It is a matter of simple fact that men have felt this difficulty, and the methods to which they have resorted to devise some way of justification, show how perplexing the subject has been to the human mind. We may learn something of the embarrassments which men feel, by the devices to which they resort to overcome them. Look then for a moment at some of the methods to which men have been driven in order to answer the question satisfactorily, How can man be just with God?

(a) One class have denied the charge of guilt, and have endeavoured to convince themselves that they *are* righteous and that they may safely trust to their own works for salvation. If this could be done, all would be well. But the mass of men have felt that there are insuperable difficulties in the way of doing this. We shall hereafter inquire whether it is practicable.

(b) Many have endeavoured to excuse themselves for their conduct, and thus to be justified before God. They are sensible that all is not right, but if they can find a satisfactory excuse, that is, if they can show that they had a right to do what they have done, or could not help it, they feel that they would not be condemned. And they are right in this. To do it they lay the blame on Adam, or on ungovernable passions, or on a fallen nature, or on the power of temptation, or on the government of God. They attempt to show that they could do no otherwise than they have done; that is, they have a right to do it in the circumstances, and of course are not to blame. We shall inquire hereafter whether this position can be made out.

(c) Many have endeavoured to make expiation by blood,

and have sought to be justified in this way. Hence the sacrifices of the heathen—the flowing blood and burning bodies of lambs, and goats, and bullocks, and prisoners of war, and slaves, and of children—offered to appease the anger of the gods. Thousands of altars smoke in this attempt, and the whole heathen world pants and struggles under the difficulty of the inquiry, How may a guilty conscience be justified with God?

(*d*) Many have sought the same thing by pilgrimages and penances; by maceration and scourging; by unnatural and painful postures of the body; and by wounds which their own hands have inflicted on themselves. The victim of superstition in India lies down beneath the car of his idol, or fastens hooks in his flesh, or holds his arm in one posture till it is rigid. Simeon in Syria, on an elevated column, spent his years in misery. Antony in Egypt went and lived in a cave, and Benedict originated the monastic system in Italy. Mecca is crowded by pilgrims seeking for righteousness by a visit to the tomb of the prophet; and the shrines inclosing the bones of the saints are encompassed by throngs in Italy for a similar purpose; the garment of hair frets and tortures the body, and the sound of the lash is heard in the cells of the convent, and the whole system of penance and self-inflicted torture all over the world is just a commentary on the question, How shall man be justified with God?

(*e*) To crown all this, another device has been resorted to. It has been held that there were extraordinary merits of saints who lived in former times; that they performed services beyond what were required, that these merits were garnered up as a sacred treasure, and are placed at the disposal of the head of the papal community, to be distributed at his pleasure to those who are conscious of guilt; and this is one of the answers given to the question, How shall man be justified with God?

From these remarks it will be seen what men have thought of the difficulty of this question. In these various ways, human nature speaks out and reveals what is passing in the bosom. They are the methods to which men have resorted as the best answer which they can give to this inquiry. To see the real difficulty, however, we should be able to go down into the depths of the soul, to gauge all the agonies of guilty consciences; to look at the woes and sorrows which men are willing to endure that they may be justified, and then to see how one and all of these plans utterly fail; how they leave the conscience just as defiled as it was before, the propensities to evil unchecked, the grave as terrific as ever, and the judgment-bar as full of horrors. When we stand and survey these things, we ask with deep concern whether any one of these is the way by which man can be justified with God? If not, is there any other way, or is there none?

*2. Man cannot justify himself by denying or disproving the charge of guilt.*

The term *justify* is a legal term, but it is also in common use, and is intelligible to all. An illustration or two will make it plain, and will lay the foundation for the train of thought which will be pursued in this section. A man is charged with murder. He may put his defence on one of two grounds. He may either deny the fact of killing; or admitting that, he may show that he had a right to do it, or is excusable for it. If the fact of killing is not made out against him, of course he is just in the sight of the law, and is acquitted. Or, if the fact be made out or admitted, he may take the ground either that he did it in self-defence, or that it was done under such a state of mental derangement as to destroy responsibility—and he is acquitted. He had no “malice prepense.” He intended no murder; he committed none; and the law does not hold him guilty of the charge. A man is charged with trespass. He takes



a similar ground of defence. He denies the fact, or maintains that he had a right to do what he has done. He sets up a claim to a "right of way" over a field which his neighbour owns, and having established that, he is acquitted, or is held to have done no more than he had a right to do in the case. He is a just man in the eye of the law, and may pursue his own business, enjoy the immunities of a good citizen, the honours of an unsullied name, and protection in his rights unmolested. It may be added here, that there is no other way by which a man can justify himself in the sight of the law. He could not do it by admitting the fact of the trespass, and by paying the fine, or making compensation for the injury done; for, though he might be discharged, yet this would be no justification of what was done, and would do nothing toward showing that he was right in doing it. It does not make a wrong right, either, to intend beforehand to pay for the mischief, or to make amends for it after the deed is done. This remark will be used hereafter in examining the attempts which men have made to justify themselves.

Now if man attempt to justify himself before his Maker, he must take one of the grounds referred to. He must either deny the charge brought against him; or, admitting the facts in the case, he must show that he had a right to do what he has done. If he can do either of these, he will be justified, for God does not condemn the innocent. We will suppose then the case of a man arraigned at the bar of his Maker, as we all soon shall be, on trial with reference to eternity. There are two things that occur to us at once. What is the charge against him? What is the defence which he sets up? If there is no charge, he is justified of course. If his defence is valid, he will be acquitted.

It is necessary then, first to look at the charge which is brought against man.

The charge is, that he has violated the law of his Maker,

or is a transgressor. It is that of apostacy or revolt from God; the entire failure to keep his laws; living constantly in the neglect of acknowledged duty; and the habitual commission of known sins. It may be assumed here that every reader of this Tract is sufficiently familiar with the Bible to know the nature of these charges, without their being specified in detail. No one trained in a Christian community can be ignorant of the account of our race which the Bible gives. These charges of guilt do not make the impression which they ought, for these reasons: because we are so familiar with them; because others are implicated with us; because we do not cordially believe them. Many a man reads the account of human nature in the Bible without supposing there is any thing serious in the matter, or much fitted to trouble him. There is many a one who would pass a sleepless night, if he knew there was a charge of petty larceny against him, which would bring him into court to-morrow, who has no trouble at the charge of total apostacy and utter revolt brought against him by God. There is many a one who would be in the deepest consternation if he knew that his name was before a grand jury in some such connection as his conscience could easily suggest, who has no alarm at the thought of the "Grand Assize;" and no dread of the formidable catalogue of crimes drawn up against him in the secrecy of the divine Councils. A few remarks will demonstrate that these charges against man in the Bible *ought* to make an impression and that men ought to be willing to look at them. A case or two may be supposed which will show how men ought to be affected in view of such charges brought by the Creator. The case of an officer in a bank may be referred to. He has been long there, or in other stations in public life, and has gained a character compared with which all the gold that the vaults of the bank could contain would be worthless as the sand. Suddenly, charges are brought against him of unfaithfulness to his trust. They come from quarters

worthy of his attention; are of such a source as inevitably to gain the ear of the community; are such that his family must know of them; are sustained by such circumstances of actual losses in the bank as to render the charge credible, and are of such a character as to make it necessary for him to leave his post, disgraced perhaps forever. Now it is not necessary to suppose that these accusations are true. All that is designed is to show the effect which charges of guilt from a respectable quarter usually have on a man's mind. But suppose he secretly knew they were all true, how could his conduct be explained, if he was utterly indifferent and unconcerned?

In regard to the charges which are brought against man a few remarks may be made here, showing that they should be allowed to make an impression on the mind.

(1.) One respects the source from whence they come. They are professedly the charges of our Maker and final Judge. They are those on which we are to be tried at his bar, and in reference to which our destiny is to be determined.

(2.) They are the most fearful of all accusations which can be brought against a creature. No crime can be equal to that of being an enemy of God; and no offence against human society can equal in enormity and ill desert, the crimes of which man is charged against his Maker.

(3.) The charge extends to every human being. No exception is made in favour of youth, beauty, rank, or blood; none in favour of the amiable, the honest, or the moral; none in favour of those who have endeavoured to wipe away the accusation by their own good living. It is not indeed charged that one is as bad as another, or that any one is as bad as he can be, but it is that every one is guilty of violating the law of God, and is held to be such a sinner that he cannot save himself.

(4.) It is charged that each and every one is of such a character that the eternal pains of hell would be an adequate recompense for his crime. He is held to be under condemnation

and to be justly exposed to punishment that shall be severe in the extremest degree, unmitigated and everlasting. Each one is held to be such an evil-doer that it would be wrong for God to admit him to heaven as he is, but not wrong to consign him to unending wo. It is important not to disguise any thing about this, or to seek to hide it by soft names. The robber is deemed worthy of the penitentiary; the murderer is regarded as deserving death on the gibbet; and in like manner it is held in the charges brought against man, and the threatenings appended to them, that every man deserves the pains of everlasting death, and that if he should receive what is properly due to him, he would be cast off from God, and punished forever. Such is the nature of the charges against man. On these he is held guilty; on these he will be arraigned. The Bible has two aspects. It reveals a way of pardon; but it is also the grand instrument of indictment against man. It is designed to reveal his character; to record his crimes; to overwhelm him with the conviction of guilt; and be the rule of judgment on the final day. The question then arises, now to be considered, whether if these are the charges against man, he can vindicate or justify himself. It has been already remarked that there are but two grounds to be taken in such a vindication. One is, to deny the facts charged on man; the other is, if the facts be admitted, for him to show that he had a right to do as he has done. There is nothing else that can be conceived of in the case, to be done by him, unless it were to attempt to make expiation or reparation by extraordinary merit; by penance or by sacrifice; though this would not *justify* him for what he had done, any more than a man's paying a fine made it right for him to put out his neighbour's eye, or burn his house. If neither of these things can be done, it will follow that man cannot be justified by his own righteousness. These points will now be considered in their order. The first is that man cannot deny the truth of the charges brought against

him. In support of this the following considerations may be urged :—

(1.) The source whence these charges come. They are made by God himself. It is assumed here that the Bible is true, and the argument will be conducted on that assumption. In another part of this Tract it will be shown that it is equally impossible to deny the main facts, whether the Bible be true or false. The position now is that the sinner cannot take the ground that God has mistaken the facts about man, or that he has designedly brought a false accusation. It surely cannot be necessary to go into an argument to prove this, but an illustration or two may be allowed.

(a) One is that it is impossible for God to mistake on this subject. Men often do mistake in reference to character and conduct. Charges are often falsely brought and men are often condemned as guilty, on false accusations. This may be intentionally done; or judges and jurors may be mistaken; or witnesses may be suborned to sustain the accusation, or those needful for the defence may be absent, or a combination of circumstances which no human sagacity can control may seem to confirm the charge of guilt against the innocent. But obviously no such mistake can occur in relation to the charges brought in the Bible against man, nor can man set up a vindication of himself on the ground that his Maker has erred in reference to the facts alleged.

(b) As little can he urge that the accusation has been overdrawn; that a degree of guilt has been charged such as the facts would not justify; or that there has been an intermingling of prejudice or passion that has given a colouring to the charge, and that a calmer view may modify these accusations. We can easily admit that such things may occur among men. Judges and jurors are liable to the same passions as other men, and in a time of popular excitement it may happen that the contagion may reach the bench and the jury-room, and hence the laws are careful that the adminis-



tration of justice shall proceed with as much calmness and coolness as possible. It may happen also that false charges are brought against men because they are obnoxious to those in power. Many a one who has stood in the way of the purposes of a tyrant, has been removed under the form of law to gratify the passions of such a man, and many a pure name has been covered with infamy by the malignity of those in authority. But it is not needful to show that none of these things can be alleged by man in regard to the charges brought against him by his Maker. It cannot be pretended that God has been hurried into these charges under the influence of passion, or that man is obnoxious to his purposes and that he would have him removed. The charges are made with the utmost deliberation. They are made by the most benevolent Being in the universe; by one who can have no pleasure in finding out proofs of guilt; by one who, from his nature, is disposed to make every possible allowance for weakness and infirmity; by one who sees better than man can state it, every thing that can be said in his defence; by one more disposed than any human being ever was to do justice to all that is amiable and pure. If man wishes to find a friend who will be kind to his infirmities, and do justice to him when the world does him wrong, he can find no such friend as God.

(c) It may be added here that the charge is one that no denial affects. It has been deliberately made, and is that on which we are to be tried. We may deny it, or disregard it, but it is not affected. Whatever we may choose to think of it, it does not change the estimate which our Maker affixes to our character any more than the private views of a prisoner at the bar modify the estimate of the judge and jury. God will pronounce sentence on us according to his own estimate of our character, and the only security which we can have that we shall not meet with condemnation, will be in the fact that our character will be such that he will regard it as not

proper to condemn us. But that cannot be by attempting to deny the truth of the charge which he brings against us, or by holding him either to be malignant or mistaken.

(2.) To show that man cannot deny the truth of that which is alleged against him as a violator of the law, it may be observed, secondly, that so far from obeying the perfect law of God, he has failed of yielding perfect obedience to the very lowest rules of morality. The standard at which man aims is in general low enough, and one which it might be supposed was sufficiently accommodating to satisfy one who wished to save himself by his own righteousness. That standard is, at any rate, at an immeasurable distance from the holy law of God. Yet let a man take any standard of conduct which he pleased, and he would fail in all attempts to show that he had always been conformed to it. Who would undertake to prove, before any tribunal that could take any cognizance of the motives, the thoughts, the words as well as the outward conduct, that he had always been honest, true, kind, chaste, or courteous? Who would attempt to prove, that he had on no occasion failed in his duty in the tenderest relations of life? What child is there that would undertake to prove, that he has never failed in his duty to his father or his mother; that he has always been as respectful, obedient and grateful as he ought to have been? Is there no compunction when he sees a father die? Is there nothing which he would wish to recall when he stands by a mother's grave? What brother would undertake to vindicate all his conduct toward a sister? or what friend is there that has never had a feeling toward his friend which he ought not to have? Who is there that would undertake to say that he has never failed in the duty of perfect honesty and truth in the transactions of business? Nay, to come down to a lower standard, who, professing to be governed by the laws of honour, would venture, when he comes to die, to stake his eternal welfare on

the fact that he has never failed of perfect conformity to that arbitrary code? Who that professes to be governed by the rules of etiquette would attempt to maintain that those laws have always been perfectly observed? Let a man choose his own standard of action; let him refer to any code by which he professes to regulate his conduct—would he be willing that every thought, and word, and feeling and action of his life should be brought out to noonday, and that his eternal welfare should be determined by the issue of the question whether he had or had not been perfectly conformed to that code? If not, how shall he vindicate himself from the charge of sin? And if he cannot vindicate himself in reference to these low and imperfect standards, how shall he stand acquitted of the charge of a violation of the high and holy law of God—that he has never made a standard or rule of life—that he has never attempted to obey? The love to his Maker which that requires he has never once attempted to exercise. The holy duties which that enjoins he has never endeavoured to perform; its sacred injunctions he has never thought of bearing with him to the relations of life, to the counting-room, to the circles of his friendship, or to the scenes of his amusement. How, then, will he proceed in attempting to show that the charges of guilt brought against him are not true?

(3.) The charges which are brought against man by his Maker are sustained by all the facts of history. What ground would that man take who should attempt to show that the accusations in the Bible against the race—that it is sinful and prone to evil—are unfounded and false? On what would he base his argument? To what part of the world—to what historic monument—to what recorded opinions would he turn? Men often feel that the account in the Bible of the character of man—of the human heart—of the tendency of our nature—is harsh and gloomy. They

are inclined to think better of the race, and to suppose that the views in the Bible must have been derived from the observation of man in a peculiarly dark age of the world, or were the result of feelings bordering on misanthropy. They think that man is better than he is there represented, or at least that, by certain modifications in society, he reaches a state where that description does not apply to him. On this account it is felt that the charge is one that cannot be sustained, and that it is not true now that all hope of salvation, on the ground of an upright life, is cut off. But let a few indisputable facts be submitted to candid men.

(a) One is, that the historic account of human conduct in the Bible is no worse than in other records. The narration of crimes, of wars, of ambition, of carnage, of blood, of sensuality, of venality, of political profligacy or corruption of manners there, is no worse than is to be found in Livy or Suetonius; in Gibbon or Hume. Every crime recorded in the sacred narrative has more than one parallel in the records of profane history, and every sentiment there expressed about man can be confirmed by any number of testimonies that the most sceptical could demand. The world has been many a time in a state like that described by Moses as the cause of the deluge; and the earth now bears up many a city, where all the crimes on account of which Sodom was overthrown still have an existence. Herculaneum and Pompeii have been revealed, by the monuments exposed to human view from beneath the ashes that covered them, to have been as corrupt, and corrupt in the same sense, as the cities of the plain; and a single one of the capitals of Europe embosoms probably now more revolting sins than they all. There is not an instance of fraud, corruption, or villany, attributed to man in the Bible, which has not its parallel in the present age of the world. The instances of depravity, whose deeds are recorded in the Bible, find abundant parallels in profane history, and not

one of the names of guilt there referred to surpasses in wickedness those of Nero, or Tiberius; of Alexander VI. or his wretched son; of Henry VIII. or Charles II.; or of the leaders of the French Revolution.

(b) The account contained in the Bible, of human depravity, is sustained by the opinion of the sober and reflecting in all ages. Those who have given themselves to the contemplation of the condition of the world, have seen it, (the sad tendency to depravity in human nature,) lamented it, and sought to correct it; and yet the current of iniquity has swept over every barrier which man could erect against it, and sweeps on unchecked from age to age.

(c) The same view of the human character has been taken by wicked men themselves. Byron had no confidence in human virtue; Walpole said that every man had his price; Chesterfield regarded all virtue as false and hollow; Robespierre and Danton acted under the belief that every man deserved the guillotine. And

(d) Every man acts on the presumption that every other man is a sinner, and that no confidence can be placed in him without securities, and expects that every other one will regard him in the same light. This security is not in human virtue, but in vaults, and bars, and locks and bonds, and he himself expects to be treated by every other man as if he had the same character. His head neither hangs down with shame, nor do his eyes flash with indignation when he is asked for security that he will pay an honest debt, or when he is told in a bank, or on exchange, that no individual or corporation will trust him, without having some other security besides himself that he is a safe and honest man. In these circumstances, how can man go before God and attempt to justify himself on the ground that the charges against him are not true? Can he take the ground that his Maker is mistaken, or that he has maliciously brought a false accusation?



(4) There is but one other observation which it is necessary to make on this part of the subject. It is that conscience sustains the truth of all the charges which are brought. Man exhibits this very strange and remarkable characteristic, that he often frames an argument to show that the race is not as guilty as is alleged, and, perhaps, succeeds in convincing others; but still his argument does nothing to affect the proof as it lies in his own soul. There is that within himself which is to him overpowering demonstration that his arguments are all false, and that the charges against him are true. God has so formed the soul that he has there at all times what may be summoned forth at his pleasure, as a living witness that all that he has charged on man is true, and that shall render nugatory in a moment all the reasonings of men about the uprightness of their own hearts. This proof is found in a man's own conscience. This is a device by which man himself is made to coincide with and confirm the views of the Almighty—to approve where He approves—to condemn where He condemns. It stands apart from the deductions of reason; is little affected by the arguments which men may employ; is susceptible of being called up to give judgment at any time; often pronounces sentence against the favourite opinions of the man himself; uniformly declares judgment in favour of right, and condemns what is wrong, and is always on the side of God and his claims. This mysterious and wonderful power is wholly under the divine control. No matter what may be the cherished opinions of man; no matter how he may call in question the correctness of the divine testimony against human conduct, and no matter how reluctant he may be to admit the impossibility of being saved by his own works; yet God has power, at any moment, to summon the mind itself to sustain His own account of the state of the heart, and to put it into such a condition as to leave not a shadow of doubt that all

that He has said respecting its depravity is true. It requires all the art of a sinner to keep the voice of conscience silent, and to save himself from its rebukes. Well he knows that, if suffered to speak out, it will be in tones of deep condemnation. It often does speak out. In solitude; in the silence of the night; under the preaching of the gospel, when the mind in its lonely musings runs back by some mysterious law of association to the past; in a revival of religion; on a bed of sickness; or in the prospect of death, conscience often utters its voice in tones that are so distinct that they can neither be misunderstood nor suppressed. These are circumstances when man is most likely to judge according to truth, and in such circumstances he is so made as to feel, without a doubt, that the judgment pronounced by conscience is in accordance with that of the Most High, and that the views pressed upon his conscience then, about his own character, are those which will be confirmed by the sentence of the final Judge. "In thoughts from the visions of the night," said an ancient sage, "when deep sleep falleth on man, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes; there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly: How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth!" Job iv. 13—19.

The point that has been now considered is, that man cannot justify himself before God by taking the ground that the facts are not as charged upon him, or that he has not in fact violated the law of God. This has been shown by these considerations: that it is impossible to believe that

God would bring a false charge against man ; that, as a matter of fact, man fails of perfect conformity to the very lowest standard of morals ; that the account in the Bible of the human character is confirmed by all the records elsewhere existing of the character of man ; and that, when man has denied the charge against him, conscience comes in to confirm the accusations and the decisions of the Almighty.

III. *Man cannot justify himself by showing that his conduct is right.*

In the previous section, it has been shown that man cannot justify himself before God by denying the truth of the charges brought against him. In other words, he cannot take the position that the facts, in regard to his character and conduct, are not such as they are stated to be, or that his conduct has been, in all respects and all times, perfectly conformable to the law of God. He cannot take the ground which could be taken with propriety by sinless angels, that, as they have never departed in fact or in form from the strict requirements of a holy law, therefore they can claim it as a *right* to be treated as holy beings. Man cannot take the position before his Maker which a good citizen can before his country, that he has violated none of its laws, and therefore is *entitled* to its favour and protection.

The only other ground of defence, or of justification, which man can set up, is, that it was right or proper for him to do as he has done : that, admitting the facts in the case to be as they are charged ; that he does not love his Maker with a perfect heart ; that he violates his laws ; that he is under the influence of unholy passions, and that he neglects many things which are required of him, yet that such are the circumstances in which he is placed, that it is not wrong for him to do as he has done, or that he has a valid excuse, and ought not to be condemned. His condi-

tion, he might be ready to admit, is one that is to be pitied; but his conduct is not such as to deserve blame or punishment. If a man can make this out, he will not be condemned; for God will not condemn the innocent. If man has a good and sufficient excuse for what he has done, there is no being in the universe who will look more benignantly on it than the Almighty; for there is no one so ready to do justice to the innocent, or to allow its proper weight to all that ought to exculpate. It is necessary, therefore, to examine this ground of defence, or to inquire whether man can set up the plea that he has a right to do as he has done—to live as he is in fact living.

Man is soon to stand before his Maker on a high charge of guilt. If he cannot deny the facts charged on him, he must take the ground that he has a right to do as he has done; that he has a valid reason which excuses him; that he ought to be acquitted, and that his deliverance should be hailed everywhere with songs and rejoicing, and that he ought to be received to heaven in triumph. What is this ground of defence? What is its value? Will it avail on the final trial?

Here it may be observed that man will not set up the plea of insanity, though more insane on the subject charged on him than many who have been acquitted on that ground by human tribunals. Man has too much pride and too much confidence that he is right, and that God is wrong, to urge this plea. Nor would he maintain that God has no jurisdiction over the case; for nothing is plainer than that he owes allegiance to the laws of his Maker, and that he cannot go beyond the limits of his empire. The points on which the accused sinner must rely, if he would undertake to show that he is not to blame for what he has done, and to justify himself, must be such as the following:—Either that the constitution of things under which he is placed, is such as to make it inevitable that he should do as he does; or that he is but

acting out the nature which God has given him, and that therefore it must be right; or that the law of God is unreasonably severe and stern, and he is excusable for not obeying it; or that the time of preparation for eternity is too short, and that too great interests are made to depend on this brief period of existence; or that the penalty is too severe, and that if a man acts as well as he knows how, though he does not conform to the holy law of God, he ought not to be recompensed with eternal torments. If these points can be made out, man ought to be acquitted. If they cannot, has he any other ground of defence on which he can rely?

1. The first of these grounds of defence is derived from the constitution of things under which we are placed. Our minds, when we set up this defence, go back to the arrangement with Adam, and the effect of his sin on his posterity. The form of this defence is, that his fall, by the divine arrangement, placed us in far more unfavourable circumstances for salvation than we would otherwise have been; that his apostacy made it certain that all his descendants would sin; that it made it certain that the first act of each moral agent on earth would be wrong; that there was a strong probability thus created that all his posterity would be lost, and that all our strong propensities to evil, and our exposure to ruin, are to be traced to this arrangement. If they who rely on this ground of defence were disposed to take shelter under the declarations of Scripture, the defence would be found in the following statements of the apostle Paul: "Through the offence of one, many are dead." "The judgment was by one to condemnation." "By one man's offence, death reigned by one." "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation." "By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners." The law entered that the offence might abound." Rom. v. If these things are



so, how can man be held to be guilty for conduct thus rendered certain and inevitable?

The question now is, whether this can be regarded as a vindication of the undisputed facts in the conduct of man. Will it be admitted as a sufficient reason for what we have done in violation of the holy law of God, when we stand at his bar? The fact is undeniable that man thus early goes astray, and that he continues to wander farther and farther, unless he is restrained or reclaimed. Is it a sufficient excuse for this that Adam fell, and that we live under such a constitution that his sinning made it certain that we would sin also?

Now, in examining this question, we may admit two things. One is, that our circumstances, in consequence of his fall, are in many respects less favourable than they would otherwise have been; or that incalculable evils have come upon us in consequence of his apostacy; and the other is, that there is much about it which neither Revelation nor human philosophy explains. But these are different points from the one before us, whether that act of our first father is a sufficient excuse or apology for our crimes; or whether we can take shelter under that constitution as a vindication from the charge of guilt. In reply to this, two or three remarks may be made.

The first is, that we are responsible not for his sin, but for our own. The sin which is charged upon us is not his, but ours. The question is, not whether his acting as he did will free us from accountability, or ill-desert, on account of *his* act, which is plain enough; but whether it will free us from ill-desert, on account of *our own* sins. We could not be held guilty, *i. e.* blameworthy, for his sin; and if this were the charge, the defence set up must be conclusive. No reasoning has yet shown that man either *is* or *can be* regarded as blameworthy on account of the crime of his first father.

Again, the fall of Adam, and the constitution under which we live, compel no one to sin. Whatever may be their theories about native depravity, yet clear thinkers universally hold that all which is properly sin, is voluntary, and there is nothing in which man more consults his own pleasure than in the course of life which he pursues. Every profane man means to be profane; every dishonest man prefers to be dishonest; every sensual man has pleasure in moral corruption. It is a great law of our being, that where freedom ends, responsibility ends, and there is nothing more universally true than that a wicked man does only what he prefers to do. Nay, the sins which are charged on him are very often the fruit of long and deliberate plan; and so attached is he to a course of iniquity, that no argument or entreaty is sufficient to induce him to attempt to change his method of life. So voluntary are men in their sins, that there is no argument or topic of persuasion which will induce those living in sin, of themselves to break off their transgressions and turn to God. A man must take the ground that he is compelled by the act of Adam to do what he would otherwise not do, before the apostacy of our first father can be a vindication from the charges alleged against him. Further, this plea would neither be urged nor admitted by man himself in any other case. In all the numerous charges brought against men before human tribunals in different lands and ages, it is probable that this has never once been alleged as a vindication. To no murderer, thief, pirate, or traitor, has it ever occurred to urge this in his own defence. The state of the world has never been such that it would be tolerated for a moment; nor has the consideration that Adam fell, and that we are under a constitution where all men sin, ever, probably, in a single instance, even modified the verdict of a jury. There have been men on the bench and in the jury-box who have held this as a theological dogma, or as an excuse for their own sins before

God ; but in a court-room nature speaks out, and no man would venture to apply such a dogma of theology to a decision of the bench. What would it avail on a charge of murder before any court in the world ?

One other remark : It remains yet to be shown that the facilities for obtaining the divine favour, by men in their fallen state, are less than they would have been had they entered the world in the condition of their first parents. Are any sent to hell for Adam's sin alone ? That remains yet to be proved. Are any infants lost ? Not a particle of evidence has ever yet been furnished of this. Is it beyond the capacity of children to please God ? Let the remarks of the Saviour about the hosannahs in the temple answer. Is it less easy for *us* to obtain the divine approbation and to be saved, than it would have been if Adam had not fallen ? That remains to be proved. If a choice were to be made, it would seem to be easier for a fallen being to believe on Christ and to trust to him for salvation, than for even a holy being, who was liable to change, to keep a holy law unbroken forever. And, in fact, both our first parents, who were holy, and a portion of the holy angels, failed to retain their uprightness, while God vouchsafes his powerful grace to enable us to believe. If these things are so, then man cannot put his defence on the ground that he is brought into the world under a constitution which made it certain that he would be a sinner.

11. A second ground of defence to which man resorts in self-vindication, akin to this, but more common and plausible, is, that he is but acting out the propensities of his nature. He did not make himself. He is as God made him. He is but indulging inclinations which his Creator has implanted in his bosom, and the indulgence of which, therefore, cannot be attended with blame, or followed by His displeasure. Can it be wrong for him to look upon the light of the sun ? Can it be wrong for him to be charmed with

the beauty of a sweet landscape, or the pleasant music of a waterfall? Can it be wrong for him to allay the demands of hunger and thirst, to protect himself from cold, and to provide a shelter from the storm? The innocence of these things being admitted, as it must be, he applies the concession to *all* the propensities and inclinations within him; to all that has led him to do what is charged upon him as wrong, and says, I am as God made me, and for that I cannot be held to be guilty. I ought, therefore, to be acquitted of the charge of guilt. Let us inquire whether this will answer as a ground of defence before God.

The most obvious remark in regard to it is, that, if it is a valid excuse in reference to religion, it is in reference to human conduct generally. For why may not any man accused of crime urge the same thing in self-defence? Has he done any thing more than act out certain propensities which he found in his nature? When Cæsar crossed the Rubicon, Hannibal the Alps, Alexander the Granicus, and Napoleon poured his armies on Italy, Egypt, Austria or Russia, did either do any thing more than follow out the inclinations of his nature? Did they not find stirring within them a spirit of ambition which urged them on to trample down the liberties of mankind? Did Robespierre or Diderot, Alexander VI. or Cæsar Borgia, do any thing more than act out certain propensities in their souls? Did Torquemada in the inquisition, or Cortes in the butcheries of Mexico, do any thing but act out what they found within theirs? And the assassin, the duellist, the murderer, what does he do more? Is he not as God made him, as much as the sinner who urges this plea? And would not this plea be as good for the one as the other?

But, further, this plea is contrary to the convictions of common sense and the universal judgment of right among men. If it were well founded, then the true course for man, if he would please God, would be to give unrestrained

indulgence to every inclination in his bosom. Nay, then it would be wrong for him to check *any* of his passions, and his duty would be to give them the rankest growth and the broadest indulgence possible; for should not man cultivate all that God has implanted in his bosom? Then all the restraints on the passions of children must be displeasing to God; all the lessons of order, morality, and religion, are a contravening of his wishes; all colleges, schools, and churches are a nuisance; all court-houses and prisons are a violation of human liberty. Then the great benefactors of the race, and those who have been especially the friends of God, and have obtained the highest seat in heaven, have been those who have proclaimed the innocence of universal licentiousness, or who have furnished the greatest facilities for the indulgence of passion. From the preachers of religion; from pious princes; from the dispensers of justice; from the patrons of order and of law; from Paul, Aurelius, and Hale, the crown is to be transferred to such moralists as Paine, such princes as Charles II., and such judges as Jeffries. But who is prepared to take this ground? This view goes against the common sense and the common judgment of men. There *are* things in man to be restrained, in order that he may be virtuous. It is not sufficient to secure the meed of virtue to say, I am as God made me, and am but acting out the propensities of my nature. What, then, is the mistake which is made in this plea? What fallacy is there in it, for it seems to have plausibility and truth? An answer may be readily given to these questions by making a distinction, which the young man may apply through life to the noblest purposes of self-improvement. In the pleas set up, two things are confounded which are wholly distinct, and to be dealt with on different principles—our constitutional propensities as God made them, and our corrupt propensities which have another origin. The former are to be cultivated and carried to the highest pitch of per-



fection possible; the latter are to be checked, restrained, subdued. The former are innocent, noble, and ennobling; the latter are debasing and degrading—"earthly, sensual, devilish." There *are* propensities of our nature, and laws of our being, which God has implanted, and which, if kept within proper limits, are harmless, or which may contribute to our highest elevation in the scale of existence. To eat, to drink, to sleep, are laws of our animal being—harmless if restrained, debasing if indulged in contrary to the just rules of temperance; to aspire after knowledge, to seek a "good name," to rise to the fellowship of higher intelligences, to bring out and cultivate the benevolent affections, is to follow nature as God has made us, and never betrays or debases us. But to follow out the inclinations of ambition, and pride, and vanity, and lust and revenge, is a different thing. These debase and sink to a lower level than that of brutes; for, in proportion as we may rise, so may we descend. The star that culminates highest may sink the lowest, and as woman, if vile, sinks lower than man can, so man, if debased, sinks beneath the brute.

Men mistake, then, in this. When they indulge in these things, they are *not*, in any proper sense, acting out their nature. They are not as God made them. They are sunken, debased, fallen. Let men act according to the great laws which He has impressed upon their being, and they will be noble, holy, godlike. Thus acting, man would have met the approbation of his Maker, and might have pleaded innocent to the charges of guilt. But let him not give indulgence to corruption, and then seek shelter in the plea, "I am as God made me."

III. A third ground of defence would be, that the law of God is stern and severe, and that his requirements are of such a nature, that man has no power to comply with them. The position which would be taken is, that there is no obligation where there is no ability, and that, as man now

has no power to yield obedience, he cannot be held to be chargeable with guilt. The principle here stated seems to be one that is based on common sense, and that must ever command the assent of all men who are not blinded by theory or by prejudice. It is impossible for man to feel himself guilty or blameworthy for not doing what he had no power to do. He may count it a misfortune, or he may experience calamities and suffer losses, because he has no greater power; but it is not possible for him to feel on this account the compunctions of remorse. With the limited powers of man, it is impossible for him ever to feel himself guilty for not creating a world, or not guiding the stars, or not raising the dead, and he cannot conceive that, by any revelation whatever, or any course of reasoning, or any requirement laid on him, he should ever feel himself blameworthy for not doing those things. If, then, it were so that God has required of man more than he is in any sense able to perform, the nature which he has given us (and which, in that case, would be a very strange and unaccountable endowment) would teach us two things: one, that his government was a tyranny, and the other, that man could not be to blame. Such a creature, under such a government, might be made to suffer, but could not be punished; he might experience pain of body, but he never would know the pangs of remorse. But is this so? The law itself is the best exponent of the views of God on this subject, and that law is clear and explicit. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matt. xxii. 37-40. Could any thing be more reasonable than this? God asks nothing which we have not; nothing which we have no power to render. He asks "*all*" the heart, the mind, the strength,

and he asks no more. He does not require for himself the service claimed of angelic powers, but that adapted to our own; he asks no love for our neighbour which we do not feel that we are abundantly able to show to ourselves. To take shelter from the charges against us, under the plea that our Maker has required services beyond our power to render, is therefore directly in the face of his own requirements; is to charge him with tyranny where his requirements are as clear as noonday, and as equal as they can be, and where he has expressly told us that the plea cannot and will not be sustained:—"O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? Therefore will I judge you, O house of Israel, according to your ways, saith the Lord God. Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Ezek. xviii. 29, 30.

IV. A fourth ground of defence, on which man charged with guilt is secretly relying in self-justification, is, that the penalty of the law of God is unreasonably severe, and that no consideration can make it right to recompense the errors and crimes of this short life with eternal punishment. The ground here taken is, that it would be *wrong* for God to punish man in this manner, and therefore that man has a claim to eternal life. The inference drawn by the sinner charged with guilt is, that if the penalty is unreasonably severe, he cannot be held to be guilty, and has a right to disregard the law of his Maker. Now it is not designed here to attempt a defence of the doctrine of eternal punishment, or to show that the impenitent sinner will suffer for ever. It must be admitted that there are mysteries on that subject which the human powers at present cannot explain. All that the subject demands is to examine this reasoning which the sinner sets up in his defence. Is the severity of a penalty then, even supposing it to be wholly unreasonable, a valid excuse for violating law or tor

doing wrong? It is possible to conceive, for such things have been, that the penalty for the crime of treason may be entirely too severe; that its execution may be attended with barbarous cruelty; and that it may be followed by a taint of blood, and by inflictions on the family of the traitor wholly unjustifiable by any principles of equity; but would this be any justification of the act of treason? Does it make the betrayal of the state a matter of duty or of innocence? Is it such a meritorious act that he who performs it has a claim on the offices and emoluments which a sovereign has to bestow on deserving subjects? So in the matter before us. If there are things which we cannot explain about future punishment; if it has a degree of severity which we have no means of vindicating; is it fair to infer that it is *right* to violate the law of heaven, and has he who does it a *claim* on the crown of glory? Yet this seems to be what is involved in this ground of defence which a man charged with sin sets up. Would it be reasonable or proper for him to suppose that God would *admit* a plea, drawn from his own alleged injustice and cruelty, as a reason for the habitual violation of his law? But the plea has no force in another respect. Our relations to the administration of justice are not only concerned with the question what the penalty *is*, but with the question whether it is practicable to avoid it? There may be reasons operating in the appointment of a penalty which we do not understand. It is only necessary for us to know what the penalty *is*, and to have such freedom that we can avoid it by a correct life. They who live in England now, or they who lived under the administration of the laws in times of greater severity, can have no reason to complain, so far as appears, of the punishment affixed there to treason. It can be readily seen, indeed, that there would be much that would be painful and disgraceful in being drawn on a hurdle to the place of execution; in being quartered and

publicly exposed ; in the confiscation of property ; the degradation of a family, and the taint of blood. Why should a good citizen, who did not design to commit treason, complain of it? It would be easy to avoid it, and his knowing the severity of the punishment should only make him the more cautious to do his duty to his country. Least of all, knowing what the penalty was, could he set up a plea of innocence when he had betrayed his country, on the ground that the penalty was severe. Without pursuing this reasoning any farther, may it not be asked whether it is not just as applicable to the government of God as to a human administration?

V. There is but one other ground of defence or self-justification which the accused sinner can be supposed to set up. It is that too great results are made to depend on the present life ; that life is too short, that our days are too few and fleeting, that our continuance here is too uncertain, that we are liable to be too suddenly called away, to make it proper to suspend so great interests on any thing that we can do here. The accused sinner would take the ground that eternal consequences demand a longer probation, and that the longevity of the antediluvian patriarchs was a period quite circumscribed enough to make it proper to suspend so great interests upon life. Much might be said in reply to this ; but the subject may be made, perhaps, sufficiently plain by a few remarks. Reference might be made to the instances which occur in the life of an individual, or in a state, where the most momentous and far-reaching results are made to depend on the action of a moment ; but, without dwelling on the numerous illustrations which occur on that point, two remarks may be made in reply to this ground of defence : One is, that, as experience has, in millions of cases, shown, the time allotted to man is ample for a preparation for eternity. Countless hosts before the throne have found it so, and millions are on their way to join them who



find the period of probation abundant to enable them to prepare for heaven. That all others are not with them in the same blissful path, is not because life is too short to enter it, but is to be traced to other causes. Men require length of days to amass wealth, or to perfect their schemes of earthly aggrandizement; but the purposes of salvation do not need it. The giving of the heart to God in sincerity through Jesus Christ—an act which may be performed in the briefest period which a moral agent lives—is enough to secure salvation. Wealth or honour could not be secured in that way in so brief a period; but the salvation of the soul may be. The other remark is, that this vindication is set up in circumstances which painfully demonstrate that it cannot be sincere. Not time enough to secure salvation! Too great interests suspended on this brief period of existence! Unreasonable to make eternal results depend on the fleeting hours of this short life. And from whom do these objections come? From those on whom the hours of life hang heavily, and “who are often wishing its different periods at an end;” from those who are impatient for some season of festivity or enjoyment to arrive, and who elude the slow-revolving wheels of time; from those whose days are weariness and sadness, for they have nothing to interest them, nothing to do; from those whose principal study is the art of killing time, and all whose plans have no other end; from those who waste the hours that might be consecrated to prayer in needless slumber, and from whose lips each morning, while they are now locked in repose, there *might* proceed the earnest breathing of a penitent heart that would insure salvation; from those who, over worthless, or corrupting verse, or in the perusal of romances, or in day-dreams, or at the toilet, waste, each day, time enough to secure the redemption of the soul. From such lips and hearts; from those who live thus, and to whom life puts on these forms, assuredly the objection should not be heard, that too great

results are made to depend on this short life, and that therefore they are blameless in neglecting God.

If these are correct views, then the sinner cannot justify himself. It has been shown that he cannot deny the reality of the facts charged on him, and the grounds of defence which the human heart is disposed to set up in self-vindication have been considered. It is not improper, at this stage of the argument, to make a personal appeal to the reader, and to ask him to consider the views which have been suggested as a personal matter. The conclusion which we have reached is, that the unpardoned sinner is a lost and ruined being; that he is under condemnation; that he is held to be guilty in the sight of God; that he is soon to be arraigned on charges involving the question of his eternal welfare, and that, unless he is in some way acquitted of those charges, they will sink him to ruin. The views which have been thus expressed, lie at the foundation of the system of salvation by grace. They are such as, when felt, lead to the conviction of sin, and to that sense of helplessness which is preparatory to the reception of pardon and salvation by the grace of the gospel. If these views produced their fitting effect, they would leave the impression of guilt, helplessness, and danger on the mind of every one who is not converted and pardoned. Sooner or later every one will feel this. The sinner may be unwilling to admit the force of these arguments now; for no one, if he can help it, will be overwhelmed with the conviction of guilt, or have his mind unsettled and harassed by apprehensions of danger. But not always can he put this subject far from him. He will lie down and die, and those are sad feelings which the dying sinner has, when he reflects that his life has been spent in sin, and that he is dying under condemnation. He will, from the bed of death, look out tremblingly on the eternal world—on that shoreless and bottomless ocean on which he is about to be launched, and it will be

sad to feel that he is about to enter that vast and fearful world, an unpardoned sinner. He will tread his way up to the bar of a holy God ; and, little as he may be concerned about that now, it will be sad to tread that gloomy way alone, and to feel, as he goes, that he is under condemnation. He will stand and look on the burning throne of Deity, and on his final Judge ; he will await, and with what an agony of emotion ! the sentence that shall fall from his lips sealing his eternal doom. Oh, how can he then be just with God ? How vindicate his ways before him ? How stand there and justify his neglect of his commands, his neglect of prayer, his neglect of the offers of mercy, his neglect of his own soul ? How, then, can he show his Maker that it was *right* not to love him, not to pray to him, not to thank him, not to embrace his offer of mercy ? How can he show that it was right for him to live without hope and without God in the world ? How *can* he be saved ?

#### IV. *Man cannot merit salvation.*

In the previous section it has been shown that man cannot justify himself either by denying the facts charged on him, or by showing that he had a right to do as he has done. The inquiry at once presents itself, How then can he be saved ? There are but two ways conceivable : one by his own merits—that is, that he somehow deserves to be saved ; the other, by the merits of another, or of others. If it be in the latter way, it must either be by the merits of Christ, or it must be because certain eminent saints have done more than was demanded of them, and that their merits, garnered up and deposited in certain hands, can be made over to others. It is not proposed to inquire now whether this latter method be in accordance with truth, but whether men can merit salvation for themselves. They can do it if their lives are such that they deserve to go to heaven, or if it would be wrong for God to punish them forever, for “ God

will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." Job xxxv. 12. The importance of this inquiry will be at once perceived, for the great mass of mankind are depending on their own righteousness for salvation, and the grand issue between Christianity and the world lies just in this point. There are two subjects of inquiry, which, if they can be made clear, will conduct to the truth in the case.

I. What is meant by merit?

II. Can man merit heaven?

I. What is meant by merit? The word is in common use, and the common use is the correct one. We speak of merit when a man deserves a reward for something which he has done, or when it would be wrong to withhold it. He renders to him who employs him an equivalent, or what is of as much value as is paid him for his services. Two or three simple illustrations will make the common use of the word plain, and show its bearing on the question before us.

You hire a day-labourer. You make a bargain with him at the outset; he complies with the terms on his part, and at night you pay him. He has earned, deserved, or merited that which you pay him; he has been faithful to his part of the agreement, and the service which he has rendered is *worth* as much to you as the wages which you pay him. You *could* have done the work, perhaps, yourself; but you preferred to hire him, for you might yourself be more profitably or pleasantly employed. At all events, what he has done is worth to you all which you pay him, and it would be wrong, on every consideration, for you to withhold it. If you choose to give him, any thing more than was specified in the agreement, it would be a gratuity; but that which you agreed to give him he has a right to demand, and you are not at liberty to withhold it. He has deserved or earned it, for he has rendered you a full equivalent, according to the terms of the contract.

A man enlists to defend his country as a soldier. It is supposed, in the contract which is made with him, that his service will be of equal value to his country with the pay which he receives. By fighting its battles; by guarding its seacoasts, villages, towns, and hamlets; by keeping its fields from being trod down by an enemy; by protecting the lives of aged men, helpless women and children; and by defending the flag of the nation from insult, it is supposed that his services are worth full as much to the country as he receives in his pay. The pay is graduated, in part, by the best estimate which can be made of the value of the service which a man can render in this calling, and the nation would be no *gainer* by dismissing him from its service. He complies with the contract, and when he comes and shows his scars, and tells of his perils and privations, his weary marches and his risk of life, and his separation from home and friends in the cause of his country, his country will not grudge him the pittance that he receives; for he has earned it and merited it, and it would not be right to withhold it from him.

You employ a physician. The service which he renders you is regarded as a full equivalent for what you pay him. What you receive from him in his care, attention, skill, and sympathy, you consider to be fully equal in value to the compensation which you give him. Your relief from pain, your recovery of the use of your bodily powers, or the restoration to your affectionate embrace, in sound health, of a wife or child, you consider as an ample equivalent for all which he asks you for his services, and, were an election to be made, you would much prefer to pay the amount of the physician's fees, to going through those sorrows again. What he receives, you feel that on every account he deserves or has earned, and it would be wrong for you to withhold it.

In each of these cases, that is true which the apostle



Paul affirms: "To him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned of grace, but of debt." These illustrations will explain the proper sense of the word "merit." In each instance, there is an equivalent for what is paid; in each instance, what is demanded could be enforced as a claim of right. There is no other sense in which the words *merit* or *desert* can be used. All besides this is *favour* or *grace*. If you choose to give the day-labourer, the soldier, or the professional man, more than you agreed, or more than his services are worth to you, you have an undoubted right to do so; but you would not put it on the ground of his merit or desert. You would feel that it was a gratuity which could not be enforced by justice, and where no blame would be attached to you if it were withheld. If his perils, or services, or self-denials and sacrifices, were greater than you anticipated when the contract was made, or if the service rendered was really of more value to you than the amount which you are pledged to give him, you may consider yourself bound by equity to give him more; for you feel that he has earned or merited it. Thus you would be glad to compensate, if you could, the wounded soldier who has perilled all in your defence; and on the same principle, if you could do it, you would wish to recompense the man who, at the risk of his life, should save your child from the devouring flame, or from a watery grave.

II. We come now to apply these principles to the case before us. Keeping this explanation of the nature of merit in view, we approach the inquiry, whether man can merit heaven. Can he be saved because he deserves it? Can he be so profitable to God that he can advance a just claim to an admission to the world of glory? If he can, he will be saved; if he cannot, he should lose no time in endeavouring to ascertain whether there is any other way by which he may be saved? In reference to this inquiry, the following considerations may be submitted:

(1.) Man can render no service to his Maker for which the reward of heaven would be a proper equivalent. Or, in other words, the amount of service which he can render is not such as can be properly measured by the reward of everlasting life. His service to his Maker and to the universe is not of so much value that he can claim eternal life as an equivalent. We have seen that this does exist in the case of the day-labourer, the soldier, and the physician. We can see a correspondence between the service rendered and the compensation, in these cases, which makes us feel that there is a propriety and equity in the reward. But, in reference to any connection or correspondence between the service which man can render his Maker and the rewards of heaven, we can see no such propriety and equity. The one does not measure the other. The universe is not so much benefitted by the service of man, that everlasting life and infinite happiness would be only a fair equivalent, or that wrong would be done if that reward should be withheld. Yet is it not a fair principle that this must be the case if man deserves or merits salvation? Must there not have been such an amount or value of service rendered that it would be injustice to withhold the reward—injustice such as would occur in the case of the faithful day-labourer, the soldier, the physician, if their pay was withheld? That must be extraordinary service rendered to the universe, or to God, which deserves the glories of an eternal heaven as its reward. That is extraordinary service rendered to you, if a stranger rescues a child from impending death and restores him to your transported bosom; and you feel that no compensation which you can make would be more than an equivalent. That was extraordinary service which was rendered to their country by the heroes of the American Revolution; and, as the results of their patriotism and perils are seen in the unexampled prosperity of the land which they rescued, we feel that the pension of the old soldier is a very

inadequate recompense. That was extraordinary virtue which led the father of his country through the trials, perplexities, and perils of that time, and which he evinced when, having laid the foundation of our liberty, he voluntarily retired to private life, leaving the people in the enjoyment of freedom, and we feel that no wealth which the nation had to offer, no monument of marble or of brass which art could rear, would equal the measure of his praise. But has man any such extraordinary service to render to his Maker and to the universe? Has he done any thing, can he do any thing for God and for the empire which He rules, which would make the wealth of heaven and its everlasting glories only an equitable recompense? Obviously, there is no congruity, no fitness, no correspondence between the one and the other, and when men talk about *meriting* heaven, or when they feel that they *deserve* to be saved, they have not well considered the import of language. They use it correctly in common life. Is it not right to ask that it may be used with the same exactness in religion?

(2.) This general principle, which appears so obvious, may be illustrated with particular reference to the *religious* service which men render to their Maker. If man merits heaven and is to be saved on account of his own deservings, it will be conceded that the service must be in some way connected with religion, or of such a nature that it can be regarded as the service of God. You would not feel yourself bound to pay a day-labourer if, instead of working for you, he worked all day for your neighbour, or was idle; you would not think of recompensing a soldier if he slept on his post, or fought under the standard of the enemy.

There *are* religious men upon the earth, men who are honestly engaged in the service of God, and who, in connection with their religious services, are looking for the rewards of heaven. Our subject, in its progress, demands that we inquire just here, whether the service which they

render is of such a nature that they merit eternal life? Is it because they are so profitable to God and his cause that the rewards of heaven would be only an equivalent for the service which they render? Let us look a moment at this matter.

A man who is truly religious renders a real and valuable service to the cause of virtue and of God. His existence is a blessing and not a curse. The universe is made better and happier because he lives. It would be a loss to society and to the universe, if his example, his conversation, his plans of wisdom, his experience, and his generous deeds, were annihilated, or had not been. When the "rewards" of heaven are bestowed upon him, it will not be without some reference to a fitness or propriety that they should be so bestowed. There will be a sense in which every man will be "rewarded according to his works." But, in reference to the bearing of this indisputable fact on the case before us, there are two or three things that deserve to be considered.

(a) One is, that your individual existence is not necessary to secure the service which is now actually rendered. God is not so dependent on you that he could not accomplish his purposes without you, or that, if you should be removed, service of equal value might not be secured in some other way. By the great law of his kingdom, the agency of man is to be employed in the accomplishment of his purposes; but your individual agency is not indispensable. The services of a minister of the Gospel who is eminently useful, and who is at a time of life, and has a measure of experience and learning, that seems to fit him for an important station, can be supplied by some one that God can place in his stead. When he is taken away, a mighty chasm, indeed, seems to be made; but his withdrawal soon ceases to be felt, for others rush in to fill his place; as the surface of the ocean soon becomes smooth, and it seems to be

as full as it was before, though the waterspout has lifted up and carried away a portion of the mighty deep, or the sun causes it to ascend in vapours; for streams and rivers all the while pour into that ocean and it is always kept full. The man that was so learned and wise that it seemed that no one else could supply his place at the head of a college, or so sagacious and prudent that it seemed that some vast plan of benevolence depended on him, is removed—but the chasm is soon filled up; just as in storming a city, when the leader falls, some subaltern steps into his place, and leads on the conquest with the freshness of youth, and with wisdom and valour that had been in training for just this breach which God foresaw would occur. Let us not then suppose that *our* services are indispensable to God. Let us not imagine, that he is dependent on us or is under obligation to us. In the bosom of society there are undeveloped powers which will more than fill our places; in the church there is piety maturing which can do more than we can do—and the very purposes of human advancement cherished in the divine mind, may demand our removal.

(b) The religious man will reflect further that his best services do not *deserve* heaven. A man who is truly pious, and who has any proper sense of his own imperfections, and of the glory to which he is looking forward, never feels that there is any proportion between the services which he renders to God here, and the immortal blessedness to which he hopes to be elevated hereafter. He renders no service to the cause of truth and virtue, which, in his own estimation, is an equivalent for the rewards which he trusts are in reserve for him, and after all his toils he feels that those rewards will be not of “debt” but of grace, and that he is an “unprofitable servant.” God has taken effectual care of this in his plan of salvation; and whoever he may be that expects heaven on the ground of his own merit, it will not be he



who gives evidence that he is truly a devoted and faithful servant of God.

(c) If, however, at any time this feeling of *merit* or claim should arise in the mind of a truly pious man, it is effectually checked by a moment's reflection on the way in which he has been disposed to engage in the service of God at all. It is not by any native inclination or tendency of mind; it has been solely by grace. Whatever service he may render, the origin of it is to be traced back to that distinguishing mercy which led him to seek after God, when he was disposed to pursue his own ways; which recalled him when he was a wretched wanderer from the paths of truth and salvation. The case is like this. You go into a "market place" and find a man "idle," and inclined to be idle. You reason and remonstrate with him, and by persevering entreaty and the offer of reward, arouse him from his indolence and induce him to spend his time in your service. Now, however faithful he may be, or however valuable may be the services which he may render you, he will never feel that any merit is to be attributed to himself. He owes to you his industrious habits, and all which he can ever secure by his labour. Or to take a case more in point. You go into a miserable hovel, and find a wretch in the lowest stages of vice and misery. He was once a man in heart as well as in form, but now he has wholly lost the manhood of the one and almost of the other. He is loathsome by vice and disease, and is a wretched outcast. He has no wish *to be* a man again; he has no energy to arouse him from his condition; he has no friend to take him by the hand, or even to pity him in his vices and woes. You take compassion on him. You clothe him in decent apparel. You remonstrate with him on his evil course. You remind him of what he was, and tell him of what he may be still. You rekindle the dying spark of self-respect; show him that he may yet forsake the paths of vice and be respectable again; gradually

breathe into him the wish to be virtuous and pure and happy; give him a comfortable home to dwell in, and a piece of land to cultivate as his own; speak kindly to him when he is discouraged; shield him when he is tempted by his old companions; offer him ample reward for any services which he may render you; and he returns to the ways of industry, and rises to a condition of competency and respectability. Perchance in doing this, you have lighted on a "gem of purest ray serene" in that rubbish, and the unhappy wretch whom you have rescued, had a genius which takes its place among the brightest constellations of talent, and its light beams afar on the nations. Yet how will he feel in these circumstances? Will he feel that this is to be traced to his own merit, or that the wealth or honour which may gather around him are the measure of his desert? But for you he will feel that he would even now have been occupying that wretched hovel, or more likely would have been in the drunkard's grave. Whatever he has of moral worth, influence, or reputation is to be traced to you. Thus it is with the Christian; and feeling this, he cannot regard himself as so profitable to God as to merit the rewards of heaven.

(3.) If it were conceded that the rewards of heaven were a proper recompense for the religious services which man can render to God, yet they would not be the suitable reward of those who are commonly expecting heaven on the ground of their own merits. The truly religious man, as we have seen, expects heaven, not on the ground of his own deserts, but through the grace of God. We may, therefore, lay the case of such out of the question in the inquiry whether men can deserve salvation by their own merits. The other class, embracing the mass of mankind, expect to be saved because they deserve to be saved; or, which amounts to the same thing, because they do not deserve to be damned. The ground of their claim is not that they are religious,—for they do not profess to be, and not that they render such

service to the cause of God that the rewards of heaven would be an *equivalent* for their services—for they do not profess to be engaged in his service at all. What then is it? It is that they are honest, true, faithful to their contracts, honourable in their dealings, disposed to aid others in their distress, and courteous in their treatment of their fellow-men. One who leads such a life they suppose does not *deserve* to be cast off and made miserable forever; or, what is the same thing, they suppose that in all justice and equity, he *ought* to be made happy in a future state; that is, that he may be saved on the ground of his own merits. What is now the value of this claim? With the principles before us which have been laid down, let us endeavour to answer this question. This is the inquiry, Is heaven the appropriate reward of such a life? An illustration or two will make this plainer than abstract reasoning would do. You hire a man as a day-labourer. He comes to you at night for his pay. If he has been industrious according to the contract, and faithful to your interests, the case is a plain one, and you do not hesitate. But you put the interrogatory to him, “Did you go into my vineyard, and spend the day in cultivating it for me, and in a careful regard to my interests?” “No,” is the honest reply, “but I *have* spent the day diligently; I have not been an idle man. I have attended to the cultivation of my own vineyard, and been faithful to my family, and I may appeal to all my neighbours for my general courtesy and honesty of life.” If you now say that this is a case which is so palpably absurd that it never could occur, it may be replied that it has been made absurd on purpose. Such a man would be only speaking out, in the honesty of his heart, what is the secret claim of every one who is not engaged in the service of God, and who yet feels that he ought to be saved. He does not even profess to be attending to the interests of his Creator or engaged in his service. You send a clerk into the Western States to collect your

debts. He returns. "Have you been diligent and successful in the duty assigned you?" "I *was* diligent. I travelled much. In all my journey I injured no one; I treated no one roughly; I addressed no one in any other manner than in the language required in refined life. I also entered valuable lands for myself, and have a prospect of rising to affluence and respectability." "But what has this to do with the reward which would be appropriate for one employed in *my* service?" "Nothing," a child would reply. But has it not just as much to do with it as the claim of a man who does not profess to serve his Maker, and who lives only to regard his own interests, has to the rewards of heaven? You have a servant or an apprentice whom you have a right to punish if he does wrong. You enjoin on him a specific duty, a duty of much importance to yourself, and one that is clearly reasonable in its nature. At the proper time you call him to an account. The duty is not discharged; the service is not rendered. He pleads, however, that he does not deserve punishment. He has been steadily engaged all the while; he has been entirely honest and upright in his dealings with his fellow-servants; he has treated them with perfect courtesy, and has even acquired an enviable reputation for amiableness of manners; nay, he has more than once relieved a fellow-servant that was poor, and sick, and dying. All this is very well, it would be said in reply; but how can this constitute a claim for the specific reward which was offered? How can it show that he who has wholly omitted a known and specific duty does not deserve the punishment which was threatened? With what face could such a servant claim the reward due to faithful service in the cause of his master? These plain and obvious principles are as applicable to religion as they are to the common transactions of life. God requires of us a specific service. It is not general and indefinite, or left to our choice as to what it shall be. It is that we shall serve *him*; that we

shall obey his commands; that we shall seek his glory; that we shall love him, honour him, and treat him as our God; that we shall be penitent for our past sins, and be willing to accept his favour on his own terms; that we shall be serious, religious, prayerful, believing, holy. If this is done, he promises heaven. But it is *not* done. Those now referred to do not even lay claim to *any* of these things. One of the last things that they would claim, or that their friends would think of claiming for them, is that they are religious, or that they act habitually from reference to the will of their Creator. They claim to be moral, honest, true, urbane, kind, but how can this lay the foundation of a claim to the appropriate reward of piety? How, in these things, can they render *any* service to God, when they do not even intend it, which would be the proper basis of his rewarding them in heaven? No more than the day labourer, the clerk, and the servant carefully attentive to their *own* interests, but wholly regardless of the interests of their employers, can expect a reward.

Having thus stated these arguments, to show that man cannot by any services which he can render, make himself so profitable to God as to merit salvation, or be of so much advantage to his cause as to be an equivalent for the reward of heaven, it remains only to remark,

(4.) Fourthly, that, if he cannot do this by a life of obedient holiness, he cannot by any offering which he has it in his power to make. The reasons for this are so obvious as to make it needless to dwell on them. One is, that no offering which man can make, can be of any advantage or profit to God. He is made no richer by any oblation of silver and gold which we can bring him; he has no unsatisfied wants which can be supplied by our ministrations. "If I were hungry," says he, "I would not tell thee; for the world is mine and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?" Ps. iv. 12, 13. An-



other reason is, that all that we possess is his, and we can give to him nothing to which he has not already a prior and supreme right. "Every beast of the forest," says he, "is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the forest are mine." Ps. l. 10, 11. Another reason is, that nothing that we could offer would be a compensation for our past offences, or repair the evils which we have done by our neglect of duty and by our open sins. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Micah vi. 6, 7. And how shall a man profit God; how lay him under obligation to save him; how render such service as to be an equivalent for heaven? Shall he flagellate his own body? Yet how will that profit God? Shall he gird sackcloth on his loins, or wear an irritating haircloth garment to torment himself? Yet how will that benefit his Maker? Will he go on a pilgrimage to some distant shrine? How will his Maker be advantaged by that? Will he shut himself up in a gloomy cell, and withdraw from the light of the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and from the society of living men, and doom himself to wretchedness and wo? But will his God be made more rich, or happy by such austerities? Will he seize upon the objects dearest to his heart, and destroy before bloody altars the lives which his Creator has given? But will it profit God if we kill his own creatures, and pour out their blood before him? If none of these things will do, with what plea of merit can we come before him? How can we render such service as to have a claim on heaven?

In view of this train of thought, two additional observations may be made.

1. First, we see the falsehood of that system of religion which speaks of human merit; of the treasured and garnered merits of the saints of former times. If the principles now suggested are correct, how can there have been any such extraordinary and superabounding merit in past times that it may be available now for men? If there were such treasured merit left by the saints of other days, it might still be a question what claim of right any man has now to distribute it to others; but any such claim of superabounding merit is alike at variance with the Bible, and with every just principle of reason. Yet this doctrine is one of the principal supports of the papacy, and is one of the dogmas that come to our shores and demand credence in our land, and of this generation. It will be shown hereafter, that there *is* ample merit in him who died to atone for our sins, to supply all our deficiencies, and the results of which may be ours. The claim that superabounding merit has been wrought out by the saints, derogates and almost annihilates this; and the claim that his merits and theirs are lodged in human hands to be dispensed or withheld at pleasure by a priesthood, is one of the principal supports of the most appalling and terrific system of spiritual despotism that has ever tyrannized over man. Thanks to him who has bought us our portion, the disposal of the merits of his sacrifice is committed to no human hands, and can be interrupted by no human power!

2. This subject is one of direct practical interest to all. If we are ever saved, there will be a good reason for it—for nothing is merely arbitrary in the matter of salvation. There are but two ways possible of being saved—the one by our own merits, the other by the merits of another. If in regard to the latter there are no merits of the “saints” on which we can rely; no merits of parents or pious friends of which we can avail ourselves, then the merits of the Lord Jesus constitute the only foreign dependence which we can

have. The whole question is then just this. Do we rely on our own merits for salvation, or the merits of Jesus? Here the world is divided—the Christian on the one side; the pagan, the Mohammedan, the infidel, the moralist on the other. This single question separates the inhabitants of the globe into two great parties never to be united. But if the principles above suggested are correct, it may be put to every man—to his reason, his conscience, his heart, whether he *has* any merit on which he can rely as a ground of salvation? Has he done any thing for which the equivalent is to be found in the rewards of an eternal heaven? Has he so deserved the rewards of life, has he rendered such services to his Maker that he can stand at the final bar, where we all must soon stand, and claim an admission to heaven? Can he demand it as a right that heaven's portal should be thrown open to him, and he be welcomed there? If so, on what ground? What is the basis of the claim? Religion? The unconverted sinner makes no pretension to it. Repentance? He has never shed a tear over his sins. The love of God? He has no spark of love to that glorious Being in his heart. Sacrifices in his service? He has made none. An honest endeavour to do his will? He has never made this the rule of life. What is the service which he has rendered? What has been the life which he has led? What is the state of his account with God? What is the condition of his heart? O, let him look at the broken law of God, his violated Sabbaths, his rejected gospel, his grieved Spirit, his neglected word; let him look at his own life of thoughtlessness, selfishness, and vanity; his neglect of prayer, his pride and opposition to God; let him look at the sins of childhood and the worldliness and wickedness of riper years; let him look at the times when God has called and he has refused, when the Saviour has stretched out his hands and he would not regard it; let him look at his broken vows and promises, the times when he promised that he

would be a Christian if he reached a certain period of life, the solemn covenant which he made when he was sick, that if God would spare him he would be his; let him look at these things and then see whether he has a claim to an admission to heaven, and whether he can be received there because he has been profitable to God.

### V. *What is meant by the merits of Christ?*

There are few phrases in more common use than the merits of Christ; few declarations that are repeated more frequently by ministers of the gospel and others, than that man can be saved only by His merits; and few things that are more frequently uttered in prayer than that we plead His merits only for our salvation. The frequency with which this expression occurs, and the bearing which it has on the general subject now under consideration, make it proper that we should attempt an explanation of it. Common as the use of it is, a formal attempt to explain it is not often made, and it is to be feared that it is often used without an intelligent apprehension of its meaning.

The phrase does not occur in the Bible; but the idea which is intended to be conveyed by it exists there as a vital and central thought in the whole plan of justification by faith. In the prosecution of this subject it will be proper,

1. To explain what is meant when we speak of the merits of Christ; and

2. To show in what his merits consisted.

1. What is meant by the merits of Christ?

The general idea is expressed in the passage—John i. 16: “and of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace.” There was an “*abundance*” or “*fulness*” in him of which we might partake; that is, there was a completeness—*πλήρωμα*—which, in our conscious want or deficiency, could meet all our necessities, so that we could re-

ceive "grace" corresponding with that which was in him. When we speak of the merits of Christ in connection with our salvation, it is meant that there was an amount of merit in his services which he did not need for any personal advantage or for himself; which had been secured with a special purpose to supply the great and undisputed deficiency of man, and which can be made available to us on certain conditions, and in the way which God has revealed as the ground of our acceptance. The main object is not now to prove that there *are* such merits treasured up in Christ, but to explain the language. Whether the doctrine be true, and if there be such merit in him, how it may be available to us, will be the subject of future inquiry. In the explanation of the subject we may then advert to,

(1.) The doctrine respecting *merit* laid down in the last section. A man merits a reward when he has earned or deserved it; when he has fully complied with the terms of the bargain; when his services are worth as much to you as you pay him. We may recall the illustrations from the day-labourer, the soldier, the physician, in each of which cases it was said that the service rendered was fully equal in value to the pay which was given. The service measures the pay; the one is equal, or is supposed to be, to the other. To withhold the compensation is injustice, or is palpably wrong. This is the ordinary and proper sense in which the word *merit* is used among men, and it was in this sense that we endeavoured to show that man cannot merit salvation. We observe,

(2.) That cases may arise where much more may be done for you than one who is in your employ is strictly bound to perform. A reference to some of these cases will enable us to explain the subject before us.

(a) You have a man in your employ engaged under the ordinary condition of service as a labourer or clerk. Without any special agreement with him, or without any thing



being said about it in your contract, he is to do what is commonly understood to be required in that condition of life ; what is usually done by those in the same employment. He is to be at his post at a certain hour in the morning, and to remain until a certain hour in the evening, and is to be faithful to his employer's interest, and diligent in the prosecution of the business entrusted to him. On these conditions, without any thing more specific, the contract is usually made with clerks, and book-keepers, and day-labourers, and journeymen-mechanics, and lawyers and ministers of the gospel. It is not deemed necessary to be any more specific than that they shall be faithful to the interests of their employers, and render the amount of service which is usually expected in that occupation. But it is very possible to conceive that one may go much beyond that. He may be engaged at a much earlier hour than is usual, and may prolong his toils far into the shades of night. He may evince uncommon tact and sagacity in the management of affairs entrusted to him, and such may be his skill and success that his services may have a value far beyond any thing which you had anticipated in the contract. You would not feel yourself at liberty to turn him off, or to complain if he had *not* done this ; will not feel that he has a legal claim on you for any thing *more* than you promised to pay him, for you did not contract with him for this special service ; but you will be likely to feel that he has a claim of honour on you ; and if, when he leaves your service, you know of any situation of special advantage that can be obtained, you would feel yourself under a sort of moral obligation to endeavour to secure it for him. Here is something *merited* beyond what he was *bound* to do.

(b) A second case. A man in your employ may be placed in circumstances where he may have an opportunity of doing something for your *special advantage*, though of a nature which was not distinctly specified in your contract

with him. He may have great sagacity, and may watch the changes and chances in the market, and enable you to make important and advantageous purchases; he may be in possession of intelligence respecting coming changes in the markets which may be of great service to you; or he may, by uncommon tact in business, be enabled to save you from inextricable bankruptcy. Now, if he is a mere book-keeper, or salesman, you could hardly *claim*, as a matter of right, that he should bring his sagacity in these things into your service; perhaps you would hardly blame him if he took advantage of it to advance his own interests, provided he did not injure you. His specific business is to keep your books correctly, or to sell your goods in the manner in which you shall direct him, and his sagacity and tact in *these* departments you have a right to require to be employed in your service. But your contract and your claim extend no farther. Yet, if he *chooses* to go beyond this, and actually, while he incurs no possible risks, is the means of great advantage to you, an honourable man would feel that he *deserved* an appropriate acknowledgment. Many instances of this kind might be referred to; but these will illustrate the point under consideration.

(3.) It is necessary to make but one other remark, in order to see the bearing of these illustrations on the case before us. Reference has been made to *abounding merit*; to cases in which service is rendered *beyond* what was in the contract; to that which was wholly voluntary, and yet where there would be a claim *in honour*, at least, for a suitable acknowledgment, or where an honourable man would feel himself under obligation to bestow a reward. The remark which is now to be made, is that he who has this extra claim on you may do what he pleases with the reward which you may feel willing to give. It may not be needful for him, or he may not choose to make use of it for himself, but he may be disposed to make another use of it, which

will develop some trait of mind that will by no means diminish your respect for his character. Suppose some such cases as the following in the application of the instances referred to: that he should ask you to aid a younger brother of his that was just beginning business, and who was greatly in need of credit; or that, on the supposition that he should die, you would show kindness to an aged father or mother; or that you should appropriate the gratuity which you designed for him to some young man who was struggling to obtain an education. Or, suppose that the faithful servant should ask you to release from bondage his wife or child, in consideration of the extra and quite equivalent services which he had rendered to you. Or, to take another case, suppose a friend of his had, in an unhappy moment, defrauded you, might he not ask you to "set that to his account?" In either case, would you not feel that what he asked he had a right to ask? And would you not be the more deeply affected with respect for his character by this request? He did not perform the extra service for reward. He did not expect it. He did not mention it to you. He did not claim *any* reward. But when *you* felt that he had a claim to it, and pressed it upon him, and would not be refused, he looked not for gorgeous or gay apparel for himself, or for a purse of gold, or a splendid house; nor did he ask you to trumpet his fame; but he looked round on those struggling with poverty, crushed and enfeebled by age, bound in affliction and iron, or burdened with debts, which they could never discharge, and asked you to forget him and to remember them. The developments of such a character would fill your mind with new conceptions of its beauty, and your heart would be insensibly knit with his.

It will be perceived that these illustrations bear on the explanation of what is meant by the merits of Christ. His merit was of this extraordinary or superabundant kind. It was beyond what could have been demanded of him, and

was such that if he chose to ask it, or so designed it, it could be made available to others. This leads us to

2. The inquiry, in what his merits consisted. Keeping the remarks already made in view, it will be necessary to show that all that he did when on earth was of this extraordinary character; that he rendered real service to the universe for which the rewards given him will be no more than equivalent; and that his merits were of such a nature that they may be made available to others.

(1.) All that he did was of an extraordinary character, or was service which could not have been demanded of him. This remark is based on the fact that he was divine, and has no pertinency except on that supposition. When it is said that his service, or work, was such as could not be demanded, it is meant that there was no law or obligation which could bind the Divinity to become incarnate, to be an humble teacher of mankind, to minister to their wants with his own hands, or to make an atonement for their transgressions. The entire transaction was of a kind which could be enforced by no law. If He be equal to the Father and one with him, he was under no law but the infinite and eternal law of his own divine nature. There was no obligation on him to become a man, a priest, a sacrifice; to toil, to weep, to die.

Another illustration may be introduced here. There is an heir apparent to a crown. Every consideration of propriety, and perhaps a statute law of the realm, require him to perform the duties of a son in the palace, and to appear and act on all occasions as becomes the first man in the realm next to the throne. But there is no law which requires him to become a day-labourer, or a menial, or that makes it his duty to go into some peasant's cottage and watch the long night by the cradle of a dying child. There may be, perhaps, no law against it if he chooses to do it; but it *cannot* be demanded of him. The Son of God in heaven would appear there always in a manner appropriate to his une-

qualified relation to the Father; but what law was there requiring him to come down to earth, to be a man of sorrows, to take part in our sadnesses and woes and to die? If he did this, the service was altogether of an extraordinary character, and was entirely a work of merit. This remark is obvious. Its bearings, if conceded to be true, are of great importance. The force and pertinence of this illustration, as has been already remarked, proceeds on the supposition that he is divine. If he is not, however exalted as a created being he may be, it does not appear how he could have *any* extra merit, and consequently how the doctrine of justification by his righteousness could be held. If he is a mere man, or an angel, or an archangel, or creature of any rank, no such extraordinary service could be rendered—none could be made available to us.

We have seen that man may acquire extra merit from his fellow-man, merit which may be made available to others. The question is, why a creature may not do this in reference to the service of God; and why, if the Saviour were less than divine, he might not do the same thing for us? The answer to this question is obvious. When you employ a man, you contract for a certain amount of service or of time. You do not contract for *all* that he has. You contract for what is usual, or what you specify. All beyond the limits of that contract remains his. But there is no such contract, understanding or stipulation, express or understood, between a creature and God. *All* his powers, his time, his talents, his service, his skill, his learning, his influence, belong to his Maker. Of every creature, he demands "all the heart, the mind, the might, the strength." There is not a moment of time in which a creature can feel that he is released from the claim of his Maker; there is not a power or faculty of mind or body which he possesses, that is beyond the range of the demand of His law; there is not a service of prayer, or praise, or sacrifice, which he could render



which is beyond the limits of his duty; there is not an act of benevolence to the poor, the needy, the sinful, or the dying, he can perform, which he can feel is beyond the all-comprehensive grasp of the divine command to do good. Can a creature of the Almighty put himself into the midst of a service acceptable to God which he will feel was not required of him? Can he love with an ardour beyond what God requires? Can he maintain a degree of fidelity in temptation beyond what is demanded? Can he stoop to some scene of wo, and do good to a sufferer in a way which the law which binds him to God did not make his duty? Can he evince compassion for the sinful and the sad beyond what the law of his nature and the commandment of his Maker demands? If he cannot, how can there be such extra merit that it can be made available to others? And if the Lord Jesus were a mere man, as one class of Socinians tells us; or an angel of exalted rank, as another class assures us; or the highest created intelligence, as the Arian affirms, how could he have wrought out any merit which could be available to us? How could he have done any thing beyond what he was bound as a creature to do? How could he so step beyond the limits of the divine law, as by abounding merit, to save a world. It is difficult to see, therefore, how he who denies the divinity of the Lord Jesus can hold to the doctrine of a meritorious sacrifice on his part, or to the doctrine of justification through his merits at all; and there is a melancholy consistency in the philosophy and practical faith of those who deny his divinity, in yielding up the doctrine of the atonement, and then the whole doctrine of justification by faith. But admit that he is God, equal with the Father, and all is clear. Then, being under no obligations to become incarnate, being bound by no law to leave the throne of heaven and seek a home in a manger, a lodging place without a pillow, a death on a cross, and a burial in the grave des-

tined for another, all this is the work of extra merit, and may all be available for others. We see him in our world, not as a mere man, and thus bound by law to render every service to the cause of God, but as Immanuel—God with us—the voluntary messenger from heaven—the equal with God, performing a service to which no law bound him, and to which no other powers were adequate, and which therefore may constitute a fulness of merit which may be available for those who have none.

(2.) The second remark is, that he rendered real service to the universe by his work. His coming, his teaching, his death, his resurrection, were an advantage to the cause of God and of virtue, to the full extent of the reward which he will receive. The universe has been so much profited by his voluntary and wonderful service in the cause of virtue and salvation, that there is a propriety that he should be rewarded for it, and the reward which he will receive is no more than an equivalent for the value of the service rendered. It will be asked, What has been the advantage of his work to the universe? In what way is it to be measured or estimated? It may be replied, We do not know fully yet, nor are our minds in a condition now, if they will ever be, to estimate what is appropriate to “satisfy” him for the “travail of his soul.” But the general answer, whoever can appreciate its meaning, will be that the value or worth of his voluntary services is to be estimated by *all the evils which his coming has arrested or prevented, and by all the happiness in this world and in heaven of which it has been the cause.* If we could ascertain this, we could estimate the extent of his services to the universe, and of course the reward which is due him, or the amount of his merit. No attempt can be made by us to gauge the amount of this merit. All that can be done is to submit a few hints to illustrate the real nature of the service which he rendered.

(a) He did voluntary good through his life. He healed the sick ; gave sight to the blind ; hearing to the deaf, and vigour to the lame ; he restored the maniac to his right mind, and brought back the poor outcast who “ dwelt among the tombs ” to the comforts of home. All this was doing good to the world, which if he had not come would not have been done.

(b) He set a most holy example of virtue to mankind. He showed what true virtue is ; how man should live, and how he should meet the temptations of the great enemy of the soul. All this is so much gained to the cause of virtue, above what would have been if he had not come—and the value of having one perfect example in a world where there had been no such standard, and amidst the conflicting opinions of men on the subject of morals, cannot be estimated.

(c) He taught man by his example how to bear trials. He himself went through all the usual forms of wo and grief, and showed in each one of them, how man ought to endure calamities, and how in them consolation might be found. But who in a suffering and dying world can estimate the value of such an example ?

(d) He taught man the true character of God ; the nature of his law ; the kind of worship that would be acceptable to him, and the way in which the throne of mercy may be approached. But who can estimate the value to a sinful world of the knowledge of the way of pardon ?

(e) He introduced a religion which has contributed everywhere to the promotion of industry, purity, chastity, truth, honesty, intelligence, and liberty ; which has raised one sex from the deepest degradation, and softened the asperities, and removed the tyranny of the other ; which has led to the founding of hospitals and asylums, and which will ultimately put an end to all the forms of evil and vice which tyrannize

over man; and who can gauge the amount of service which he has thus rendered to man and to the universe?

(*f*) He made an atonement for sin—his greatest, noblest work. He vindicated by his death the honour and the law of God; and solved the question which has everywhere confounded the human intellect, how justice and mercy can meet together, and how righteousness can be maintained and yet the sinner go free. He secured to the universe by his death, all the advantages which could have been secured by the everlasting punishment of the sinner himself, and all the advantages which now result from admitting to heaven countless millions, who, but for his sacrifice, would have been eternally wretched: and what finite mind can estimate the value of this service rendered to the universe?

(*g*) He checks evil by his gospel and his grace, and turns the disobedient to the paths of virtue. Take one single example as an illustration of the amount of service which he rendered—the case of Saul of Tarsus. Think of what he would have been with his extraordinary talents, his uncommon learning, his vast energy of character, his restless ambition, and his proud and self-confident heart, if there had been no atonement, and then of what he *was* after he was converted to the cause of virtue and of truth. Think of his influence while he lived, in meeting the evils and corruptions of idolatry, in closing temples of polluted worship, in purifying the fountains of morals, and in diffusing abroad the principles of pure religion. Think of the good which has been done since his time, by his incomparable writings in maintaining the truth, and imparting consolation in a world of sorrow, and see in the conversion of that man an instance of the kind of service which the Lord Jesus rendered to the universe. Then reflect that the case of Saul of Tarsus is but one of many hundreds of millions—individually less bright, but in the aggregate outshining his, as the mingled light of the galaxy is of greater glory than the

twinkling of a single star: and then ask who can estimate the amount of service which the Son of God has rendered to the universe? All that has been done by his holy life and example; all that has been accomplished on earth by the influence of his religion; all that his death did to honour the divine law; all that has been or will be done by arresting evil and staying the desolations of sin; all the additions which have been or will be made by redemption, to the numbers of the heavenly host, and all the immortal songs and joys of the redeemed in heaven; all these things are to be taken into this estimate, and will be the measure of the voluntary service rendered to the universe by the Son of God. It remains only, in order to a complete explanation of the subject, to add,

(3.) That all the merit of his work—all the reward which he deserved, is available to others. It is that superabounding service which has been before referred to, which can be appropriated in any way that he shall ask. Not needing it for himself, for he dwells in “the glory which he had with the Father before the world was,” it can be appropriated to those who are poor and needy, and destitute of any claim of merit. The reward for all his extraordinary service may be such as he shall wish, and his heart will not ask augmented glory for himself in heaven as divine, but will seek it in the elevation and immortal felicity of the poor and lost upon the earth for whom he died. By such a reward the universe will *lose* nothing, but will on every account be a gainer, and the benevolent heart which rendered these extraordinary services, may be abundantly satisfied by asking that the “lost may be saved.” It was on grounds like these that it was said in the promise, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Ps. ii. 8. Thus too the promise was, “he shall see of the travail of his soul;” the fruit of his wearisome sor-



row, "and shall be satisfied." Isa. liii. 11. Thus too, in asking in his parting prayer, that his work on earth might be remembered, he could use with propriety the strong language when he said, "Father, I *will* that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." John xvii. 24. To secure their salvation and the universal spread of his gospel, he can urge the extraordinary claim of the service which he has rendered by his life of spotless virtue, his pure example, his relief of human woes, and the sorrows which he voluntarily endured, in order that the law of God might be maintained, and eternal justice asserted even when salvation was offered to men.

If these views are correct, then it follows

1. That we are to look nowhere else than to Christ as the meritorious cause of salvation. Had it been possible for any mere created being to have wrought out sufficient merit to save the soul, the incarnation of the Son of God, and his death on Calvary would never have occurred. The moment it is maintained that man may merit salvation for himself or for others, the doctrine of the atonement is denied, and the work of Christ dishonoured; and the doctrine that there are anywhere or in any hands garnered up the merits of holy men, of which we can avail ourselves, derogates to just the extent in which it is held, from the great sacrifice, and is an attack on the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. In our hopes of salvation we have but one place to which to look. It is not what our own hands have done, or what has been done by holy men of other times, it is the infinite merit of the Son of God.

2. The merits of the Saviour are sufficient for the salvation of all mankind. If the view which has been taken is correct, it is clear that the benefit which he has rendered to the universe by his holy obedience and death, are commensurate with any rewards which he may receive in connection

with the salvation of men. "It pleased the Father that in him" in every respect, "should all fulness dwell," and alike in his power, his benevolence, his willingness to save, and the merits of his work, there is an ample sufficiency for the wants of all mankind. Needing none of the results of his great work on earth, for the promotion of his own happiness, all that he did may be made available to others, and all men may come with equal freeness and confidence. He had the promise of an ample and satisfactory reward when it was said that he "should see of the travail of his soul and should be satisfied," and on the basis of that promise he himself uses such language as this, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" and "whosoever will, let him come and take the waters of life freely." There was no original deficiency in the merits of the Saviour for human salvation, nor has his merit been exhausted by the numbers that have already been saved. Salvation in him is like a copious fountain breaking out in a desert. Such a fountain is free for all who may come. It stands in the pathway where the multitude move—where the caravans pass along, and no one has a right to appropriate it to himself. No tribe of men may inclose it or may obstruct its waters. One company of weary travellers has as much right there as another, and to no one particularly appertains the office of dispensing it to the fainting pilgrim. Any one who will come and kneel down there may drink freely. And it will never be exhausted. The fountain will pour out its waters from age to age. The present company of thirsty travellers will soon pass on. They will pursue their journey and go off to die, but then the stream will flow on unexhausted and inexhaustible to the end of time. So it is with the fountain of salvation. As many of the present generation as choose may come and partake, and then as many of the next, and the next, and still the foun-

tain will flow on unexhausted and inexhaustible. It will flow just as fresh and just as full in the last generation that lives, as it did in the days of the Saviour's personal residence on earth; as it does now; and the last sinner that is to be saved, will find it as pure and as life-giving to his soul as it is to ours.

VI. *In what sense we are justified by the merits of Christ.*

In the previous sections, it has been shown that man cannot justify himself, and that he has no claim of merit before God, but that there is in the Lord Jesus infinite merit of such a nature, that it may be made available to us. In the prosecution of this general subject, it is proposed now to illustrate two points:—

1. What is meant by justification in the gospel; and
2. In what way we are justified by the merits of Christ.

1. What is meant by justification in the gospel?

The object here is to state what is the exact condition of a man who is justified. In what respect does he differ from what he was before? What change has taken place in reference to him? How is he regarded by his Maker differently from what he was before? What new relation does he sustain to God, to his law, and to his plan of providential dealings? These, it will be seen, are important questions which probably every one is disposed to ask who attentively considers this subject. They are questions, also, on which serious mistakes are sometimes made as well by those who attempt to explain the subject, as by individual Christians in reflecting on this new relation. A few remarks, showing what is *not* meant, and what *is*, will make the subject clear.

(1.) It is not meant that a man who is justified on the gospel plan, is justified in a *legal* sense. What it is to be so justified has been before explained. It is when a man is accused of a crime, and is able to vindicate himself either by showing that he did not do the act charged on him, or

that he has a right to do it. If he can do either of these things, or, which is the same thing, if the charge is not proved against him, he is acquitted by the law, or is held to be righteous in regard to the offence charged. In the previous sections it has been shown that, in this sense, man cannot be justified before God, and whatever may be thought of the argument in the case, it is certain that this is not the kind of justification described in the gospel. It is needful here to remark, only, that Christ did not come to aid man in justifying himself in this sense. He did not come to take the part of the sinner against God, and to enable him to make out his cause. He did not come to be his advocate in the sense of assisting him in rebutting the charges made against him; in showing that the charges had been falsely laid; in explaining his conduct so that it might not appear to be wrong; or in offering palliations for admitted criminality. Whatever be the nature of the work which the Lord Jesus came to perform, and however he may aid us in our salvation, it is all done with the concession on his part, that we are guilty to the full extent which the law charges on us.

(2.) It is not, in any proper sense, a *legal* transaction. Justification by the law is known only in one way—by perfect and uniform obedience. The law of God, in conformity with the general principles of law, knows no other mode. It makes no provision for the pardon or justification of those who violate it, any more than a human law does. The plan of justification in the gospel is a departure from the regular process of law; and whatever inferences may follow from this, either against the system or in favour of it, the fact is not to be denied. "But now," says the apostle Paul, "the righteousness of God without the law is manifested;" that is, the method of justification in a way different from that known in the law. Rom. iii. 21. All attempts to show that the plan of justification in the gospel

is a legal transaction, or is in accordance with legal principles, have been signal failures, and if there can be no other justification than that which is properly legal, the whole effort to be saved must be given up in despair. Nor does it mean,

(3.) That the man who is justified ceases to be ill-deserving or guilty in the proper sense of the word. When a man is justified by law, he is declared to be *not* guilty or ill-deserving. But it is not so when a man is justified by the gospel. It is expressly said, respecting this plan, that God "justifies the ungodly," (Rom. iv. 5,) meaning that it is admitted they *are* ungodly at the time, or that they are personally guilty. The act of justification does not change the nature of the offence, or prove that to be right which is in itself wrong. Crime is what it is in its own nature, and is not modified by the manner in which he who commits it is treated. To pardon a man out of the penitentiary does not prove that the act of burglary or theft for which he was committed was innocent; to forgive a man under the gallows does not prove that he is not ill-deserving for the act of murder. To be led from any consideration to treat a man who has injured us as if he had not done it, does not prove that the act was not wrong; or that he should not regard himself as blameworthy for having done it. Our kind treatment of him will not be likely, in any degree, to diminish his sense of his criminality, and the act of pardon with which an offender against God is met when penitent, will not lessen his sense of his own guilt. God never comes in the act of justification to convince him that he has not done wrong, but to save him, though it is admitted that he is a great sinner, and the consciousness that he is a sinner will attend him and humble him through life. He will lift up his eyes and his heart with thankfulness that he is a pardoned man; not with pride and self-complacency, that he is an innocent man. He will have the spirit of the publi-



can, not of the Pharisee. The publican that went down to his house justified would not go feeling that he was innocent; he would be filled with gratitude that so great a sinner might be forgiven.

(4.) Justification in the gospel does not mean mere pardon. It has been supposed by many that this is all that is denoted by it. But there are insuperable objections to this opinion. One is, that it is a departure from the common use of language. When a man who has been sentenced to the penitentiary is pardoned before the term of his sentence is expired, we never think of saying that he is justified. The offence is forgiven, and the penalty is remitted; but the use of the word *justify* in his case would convey a very different idea from the word *pardon*. Another objection is, that the sacred writers have so carefully and so constantly used the word *justify*. If mere pardon or forgiveness were all that is intended, it is difficult to see why another word has been constantly employed, and a word so different in its signification. And another objection is, that mere forgiveness is *not* all which the case seems to demand. There was required a reinstating in the favour of God; a restoration to forfeited immunities and privileges, and a purpose in regard to future treatment which is not necessarily involved in the word pardon. It may be conceived that, in cases of pardon for high offences, there would be required, in order to meet all the circumstances of the case, not only a remission of the penalty, but a distinct act restoring to the offender or his family his title, his hereditary honours, and his place in civil relations. The pardon of Lord Bacon would not have restored him at once to the bench, nor the forgiveness of Raleigh to his station in the court of Elizabeth. In the case of a sinner against God, pardon respects mainly the *past*; justification the purpose of God in reference to the *future*. Forgiveness remits past crimes; justification respects the purpose of God to treat the offender *as if* he had

not sinned,—and though these may be simultaneous, yet they may be separated in conception as distinct things. The one forgives the past; the other reinstates the offender in the lost favour of God.

(5.) It is not meant that, in the act of justification, the merits of the Lord Jesus become so transferred to us that they can be regarded as *literally ours*, or that his righteousness is in any proper sense our own. This is not true, and cannot be made to be true. Moral character is not capable of being transferred from one individual to another; and however the benefits of what one does may be conveyed to another, it will always be true that the character of an individual is what it is in itself. It will always be true that Christ, and not we, obeyed perfectly the law of God; that Christ, and not his people, died on the cross; and that the merit of his life and death is strictly his, and not theirs. It will always be true, also, that they violated the law of God; that their characters were sinful, and that they deserved not the mercy of God. No man can really believe that the moral character of one individual can be transferred to another, and no one should charge the Bible with inculcating any such doctrine either with respect to the effect of Adam's transgression on his posterity, or the righteousness of the Redeemer in the salvation of his people. We are prepared now to remark positively,

(6.) That justification on the gospel plan denotes a purpose on the part of God to treat a sinner *as if he were righteous*. It implies an intention not to punish him for his sins; not to regard him as any longer under condemnation; not to treat him as an alien, an apostate, and an outcast; but to regard and treat him in the future, in all his important relations, as if he had never sinned. It involves the purpose to shield him from the condemning sentence of the law and the wrath that shall come upon the guilty; to admit him to the fellowship of unfallen beings; to regard

him as entitled to all the privileges of a child of God, *as if* he had not fallen; to throw around him the ægis of the divine protection and favour to the end of the present life, and then to admit him to immortal life in heaven. These things would have been his if he had not fallen; and these things are now made his in virtue of the merits of the Redeemer. In all his great relations, in all the most permanent and important things that affect him, he *is*, and is to be, *as if* he had not sinned. The main evils of the apostasy in his case are arrested, and it is the purpose to regard and to treat him as a child of God.

It is important to remark that, in these statements, it is not designed to affirm that, in *all* respects, the act of justification places a man in precisely the same situation in which he would have been if he had not sinned. It is, indeed, designed to teach that, in the direct divine dealings with him, he will be regarded and treated as if he were personally righteous. But why, then, it will be asked, does he suffer and die? Why is he not removed to heaven, as Enoch and Elijah were, without seeing death? Why does the justified man ever pass through severe bodily trials, like Job or Hezekiah; or experience the evils of poverty and want, like Lazarus; or why is he called to part with beloved children; or to be thrown into prison, or to lie down in the sorrow of the most painful form of death, as thousands have already done, and as the children of God now often do?

It is necessary to make such exceptions or qualifications as these in explaining the nature of justification. Though justified, man is not, in *fact*, treated in this world, in all respects, as he would have been if he had not sinned. In the life to come he will be. But nothing is plainer than that, in the present life, things occur, in reference to the treatment of those who are justified, which would not have occurred if man had not sinned, and which will not occur

in heaven. Poverty, sickness, bereavement, death, and kindred evils, come upon the righteous and the wicked, the saint and the sinner, the man who is justified and the man who is not. These evils are, indeed, softened and mitigated by religion, and may be among the means by which the justified man is better prepared for heaven, but still they exist *as evils*; and are to be regarded as among the fruits of sin not removed by the act of justification, and as furnishing the exceptions or qualifications alluded to when it is said that, in this life, the justified man is not treated in *all* respects as if he had not sinned. The *reasons* why the evils of sin are not entirely arrested by the act of justification, and why the believer is not treated in this life, in all respects, as if he had not sinned, seem to be principally two:—

(a) One is, that it is not the nature of religion to arrest or change the operation of physical laws. It will have an indirect and gradual effect in checking some of those laws; but to have made that effect direct and immediate, would have required a constant miracle. It is not the design of religion to restore health or property which have been wasted by dissipation; to check the results of vice in those who have been led astray by evil example, or to stay the effects of a life of guilt on our physical frame. A life of virtue will ultimately do much to accomplish this; but to do it at once would require the physical power of a miracle. For the same reason, to be justified does not save from temporal death, and death in accordance with the laws of our physical being. No one can doubt that God *could* have saved us from this, but it would be easy to suggest reasons why it has not been done.

(b) Another reason why the act of justification does not secure the same treatment in all respects here as if man had never sinned, is that he who is justified, and who is at heart a true believer, is often in circumstances where he needs

the discipline of the hand of God. He is not at once made perfect; and his imperfections, his wanderings, his neglect of duty, his worldliness, often demand the interposition of God for his own good in a way which would neither be necessary nor proper in the case of one who had never sinned. Hence if the Christian sins, he may be recalled even by stripes. Hence he comes under the regular physical laws of the divine administration in the world. Hence he is sick or bereaved. Hence, like other men, he may be cut off by the pestilence, may be swallowed up in the promiscuous ruin of an earthquake, or lie down on a bed of long and lingering disease, and die. Here, he is subject to the physical laws of our being, and to the administration of a wise discipline; in the world to come he will be treated altogether as if he had never sinned. No distinction will be made between him and unfallen beings, nor will there be any such remembrance of his own former guilt that he will occupy a less elevated position, or have less ready access to the throne than if he had never been a transgressor.

It was proposed

2. To show how justification is accomplished through the merits of Christ, or how his merits become available to us for this purpose. It is not uncommon to say, in explaining this, that his righteousness is imputed to us, or that it becomes ours. But, as this language to many minds does not convey a very definite conception, and as on other minds it often conveys erroneous impressions, and seems to be irreconcilable with the common notions of men about moral character, it is necessary to explain in what sense we become justified by the merits of Christ. Perhaps in doing this, also, it may be shown that, so far from being contrary to the common notions of men about what is right and proper, it is, in fact, but carrying out, on the most elevated scale possible, what is practically occurring every



day in the common relations and transactions of life. It is to be observed then,

(1.) That we are often benefitted by what others have done. The meaning is, that what they have done is of the same advantage to us, for certain ends, as if we had done it ourselves. A case or two, taken from familiar transactions, will illustrate what is meant, and help to a proper explanation of the subject. Take the case of a father and a son. The reputation of the one is often a passport or recommendation to the other of very great value as he enters on life. The son has, as yet, no known character, no acquaintance with the world, no credit. The father has all these. He is widely known as a man of virtue; he has an extensive and honoured circle of acquaintance; he has ample credit in the business in which he is engaged. Now, while it is true that this character and credit belong to the father as his own, and cannot be literally transferred to the son, it is also true that, for certain purposes, it may be made to answer the same ends for him as if it were his own. Unless by his own misconduct he shall forfeit the advantage which he might derive from it, it will be a passport to him as he enters on life; it will go before him preparing many hearts to greet him with kindness; it will obtain for him the confidence of others; it may be the means of securing for him many a friend and helper when calamities come, even when his father lies in the grave. While it will always be true that all the merit and the credit appertain to his father, and while whatever may be his own subsequent worth, he will cherish a deep and abiding impression of that, it is also true that, for certain purposes, he could have derived no higher advantages in the case, if the character and the credit had been his own. It would not, indeed, to *all* intents and purposes be the same; but there are great and valuable ends in his passage through the world, which could be no better secured if all this had been his own.

The influence of his father's name and character, unless he forfeits the advantage, will attend him far on, perhaps entirely through, the journey of life.

Take another common case. A young man embarks in business without capital. He has acquired already, it may be, a character for industry, talent and honesty; but he has no means by which he can commence the business of his life. What he wants now is *credit*. If he had that he would be sure of success. But he has none, as yet, of his own. He has had no opportunity to make himself known to secure the extensive confidence of his fellow-men. You have had such an opportunity and have done it. To a certain extent and for certain purposes, you allow him to make use of your name. You endorse his paper, and agree to be responsible for him. Now this, to him, in the case referred to, is of just as much value as though the credit attached to your name were his. It will be worth as much to him in the particular matter referred to as though he himself earned all the influence attached to that name, and secured, by a long and upright life, the credit which it conveys. There will be, indeed, in other respects, important points of difference, but not in the immediate use which he designs to make of the name. He will have a very lively sense of the truth that he himself has *not* this credit; that he is unknown, and that he is under the deepest obligations to you. He will never so far mistake the matter as to suppose that your moral character and worth are transferred to him, or that he can regard either as, in any proper sense, his own; but he *will* consider that this is available for just the purposes for which he wants it. It is all he needs to secure the grand object of his life, and is as good to him *as if* it were his own.

Further: if we would look over society, we should find that this arrangement prevails everywhere, and that we are indebted to it every day. It may be doubtful

whether we live a single hour, or execute a single plan of life, without being more or less indebted to it. It is an influence diffused around us like the air we breathe, or the sun which shines on our way; or it is like the tissues of the human frame where each part derives benefits in its functions from the numerous other parts with which it is more or less closely interwoven. It enters into the very texture of society that we avail ourselves of the toils, the sacrifices, the virtues, and the honoured names of those with whom we are connected. No man acquires a name for virtue who does not do much to benefit his children and friends in this way, and one of the chief stimulants to effort in parents is, that they may place their children on as high vantage ground as possible when they embark on life. That youth enters on life under great disadvantages who cannot encircle himself with this influence, and who is constrained to "cut his way" to respectability or to wealth alone. As a matter of fact, however, there are few that do this. The name and influence of a father or a friend; a letter of commendation from those who are known and loved, will be a passport to us in distant climes, and among strangers; will meet us with its benign influence on the Rhine or the Ganges; will help us where we should otherwise fall into the hands of freebooters in a foreign land, or when we should otherwise sink under poverty and want; or on a distant shore will raise up for us a friend on the bed of death. He enters life under the best auspices who can avail himself most of this without sacrificing his independence or being a sycophant or parasite; and he is the most foolish and ungrateful of mankind who would willingly renounce all this advantage, and choose to weather the storms of life and make his way through the world friendless and alone. •

(2.) The second remark in explaining the way in which we are justified by the merits of Christ, is, that there are two methods by which we avail ourselves of the benefit of

the character and virtues of others. The one is, by natural relationship. This occurs in the case of a child, who, as a matter of course, derives advantage from the industry, the character and the credit of a parent. The other is, by an arrangement made for that end. Instances of this latter kind occur everywhere. The case of an adopted child is one—a case where there is no natural relation, and no natural claim, but where one chooses for any reasons, that the child of another should be received into his family and treated *as if* he were his own. It occurs not unfrequently in the case of a matrimonial alliance, where the one party avails itself of the name and influence and rank of the other, and on that account has a degree of respect to which, otherwise, there would be no claim. It occurs in the cases already referred to, where the use of a name is conceded. The name of the missionary Schwartz was thus the means of saving from starvation the whole of a British garrison, and many a man owes his subsequent elevation in life, to assistance furnished him at the outset. Cases have arisen where the signet or the ring of a prince has been placed in the hands of another, conveying to him, if danger should befall him, all the influence and security which they would to the owner himself; nor is it very uncommon to give a *carte blanche* to a friend to be filled up at pleasure. It remains now only, in view of these illustrations,

(3.) To remark in explanation of the way in which we are justified through the merits of Christ. It is, that we are permitted to avail ourselves of his abounding merits, so that we may be treated as if they were our own. It is not that his merits are transferred to us, or that his moral character or righteousness becomes properly ours, or that we cease to deserve punishment, or that an apology is made for our sins, or that Christ takes our part against justice; but that *his* merits are so ample, his life and death have accomplished so much, and his work has been so meritorious, that

we may, by a suitable connection with him, be regarded and treated *as if* we were truly righteous before God; so that "God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;" just and true while he "justifies the ungodly."

This connection between the Saviour and those who are benefitted by his merits is not a natural connection, for no such relation by nature subsists as would entitle any one to be regarded and treated as righteous on his account, but it is a relation which is constituted entirely by faith. The influence of faith in forming it, and in making it proper that they who are united to him should be treated as righteous, will be explained hereafter. It is sufficient now to remark, that the relation which is sustained is one that is *formed*, not one that exists by nature.

It is formed by a personal union of the soul to Christ, and by the gracious concession on his part in accordance with the divine arrangement, that we may avail ourselves of his infinite and inexhaustible merits, so that we may be treated *as if* they were our own. There are two additional thoughts which may be suggested to illustrate this:

(a) The one is, that his merit is inexhaustible. There is no diminution or exhaustion of the merit of his work, by the numbers that avail themselves of it. This makes the plan of redemption wholly different from any thing which occurs among men. A man of the widest credit and highest standing may be conceived to allow his name to be so often used by those who have no claim to it, or who turn out to be worthless, and abuse his claim, as to *exhaust* his credit, and make his name good for nothing. Not so the Saviour. No numbers that apply exhaust his credit, or diminish at all the merit of that blood by which they are saved. That blood is as efficacious now, and that holy name of our advocate is as much honoured in heaven now, as when the first sinner was justified, and when the gates of glory were first thrown open to receive a ransomed soul.



(b) The other remark is, that the Lord Jesus becomes the surety that the universe shall suffer no wrong by our being admitted to heaven. So far as we are concerned, he pledges himself to meet all the claims of the law and of justice upon us. That is, he becomes the surety, that, under this arrangement, as great good shall result to the universe by our being saved, as would be by our punishment forever. By such punishment, nothing would have been gained in regard to the honour of the law, the truth of God, and the interests of justice, which are not secured under the present arrangement by the substituted sorrows of the Son of God in making the atonement. Thus he becomes the "surety of a better covenant," (Heb. vii. 22;) and stands before the universe as the public pledge that no harm is done to any interest of truth and justice by the admission of one, who is an acknowledged sinner, into heaven. Thus the publican was justified; thus Paul, the persecutor and blasphemer, won Christ and was found in him, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but that which was through the faith of Christ," (Phil. iii. 8, 9;) and thus multitudes of the profane and the sensual by believing on Christ, have entered heaven and been blessed. There stands the great Advocate, not for their *sins* but for *them*; and there stands the security, that no injury shall be done by treating even *such* sinners forever *as if* they were righteous, and that all that law or justice could ask—all that could be secured either by their own personal perfect obedience, or by their enduring the eternal penalty of the law, has been secured by *his* holy life and meritorious death. When, therefore, they enter heaven, it is not over prostrated law; over a humbled government; over disregarded threatenings; by a changeful policy, or by partiality in the administration; it is because their great Surety has himself secured the honour of the law, and that in their conscious destitution of merit he has enough for them all. His name

is the guarantee to justice and to God; his inexhaustible merits the reason why they may be treated *as if* his righteousness were their own.

This is what is properly meant by *imputation*. The true doctrine implies no transfer of moral character; no infusion of righteousness into the soul; no physical identity between the Redeemer and his people; no charging of their sins to him, so that he became in any proper sense a sinner or deserved to be put to death,—nothing but the purpose on the part of God, in virtue of what he has done, to treat those who are themselves guilty, as if they were righteous. “By that righteousness being *imputed* to us,” says President Edwards, “is meant no other than this, that the righteousness of Christ is accepted for us and admitted instead of that perfect inherent righteousness which ought to be in ourselves. Christ’s perfect obedience shall be reckoned to our account, so that we shall have the benefit of it, as though we had performed it ourselves.” Vol. v. 394.

These views have reference to the most important subject of religion. They pertain to that great doctrine which separates Christianity from every other system of religion; and to the answer which Christianity furnishes to the question asked with so much solicitude in every age, “How shall man be justified with God?” The answer is, “That we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Romans iii. 24. It is this doctrine which divides the religion of the gospel from all other systems; which makes it what it is; which gives it whatever influence or power it has in speaking peace to the troubled conscience, and bidding the spirit that is captive under sin go free. It is this which will enable man to appear before his final Judge justified, not by any miserable attempt to deny the fact that he is a sinner; to apologise for his errors and follies, and found a claim to favour on such apology; to substitute an external morality for that holiness of heart which

the law of God requires, or to present as a ground of acceptance the vain oblation of outward forms.

But it should be observed also, that though this method of justification is entirely peculiar to Christianity, and separates it from all other religious systems, yet that it accords with principles prevailing everywhere in society, and on which men act every day and in every land. It is the embodiment and concentration of these principles, and shows their operation on the highest scale possible. Thus, as already remarked, in matters pertaining to this life, we owe to the name and standing and credit of others, an introduction to the world, facilities for doing business, valued friends who may succour us in trouble: and on substantially the same principles, though on an infinitely higher scale, we owe to the merits of another—the Son of God—an introduction to the divine favour; a passport to heaven; the friendship of angelic beings; the peace of pardon; the calmness of the Christian's death; and the crown incorruptible beyond the grave. Whatever we shall have in the long ages of eternity, of joy or peace, of honour or favour, is to be traced to the operation of this principle on the highest scale possible; that we may be benefitted by the sacrifices and toils; the name and merit; the righteousness and sufferings of another.

In common affairs we do not disregard or undervalue this. Those who enter on life regard it as a felicitous circumstance in their condition, if they may go forth with such passports and commendations to the esteem of the world. That young man would regard himself justly as destitute of every manly and generous feeling, as well as every principle of self-respect, who should discard and spurn this advantage, and prefer to go forth to the world without the commendation or the patronage of a single friend. *We* are going to a more important theatre of being than is this narrow world. We shall soon pass beyond its outer bounds and

move through other regions. We are to go up and meet our Maker ; to enter on a mode of existence that shall have no end ; to be associated with now unknown orders of beings ; and there are great interests at stake, compared with which all the interests of earth are trifles. We go to a royal court—the court of heaven—where we have no claim to a right to appear. We go up to obtain, if we are happy there, the favour of a Being whose law we have violated, and whose displeasure we have incurred. We go where we can take no wealth with us, and where if we could, it would avail nothing ; where we shall be disrobed of all in a graceful exterior, or in fascinating manners that may commend us to others here, and where, if it should accompany us, it would be valueless ; where the name of a father, or the powerful influence of a friend, that might commend us to the favour of men, would be of no avail ; where nothing on which we here rely as a passport to others, can be a commendation. But there *is* one in human flesh that dwells there. He once lived among men. He was most holy, and lowly, and pure, but he died. He rose from the tomb, and the everlasting gates were opened, and he entered his native skies. To the very interior of the court of heaven ; to the sacred seat of Deity ; to the throne itself, he has been admitted, and is seated there. With all that heaven he is familiar, for he is there at home. With all its streets of gold, with all its far distant mansions, with all its many departments fitted up for the abodes of the blessed, he is familiar. His powerful aid he proffers us in our sin and ignorance and helplessness, and assures us that he is willing that we should plead *his* name, and make mention of his merits *as if* they were our own, as a reason why we should be welcome there. In heaven his plea has never been denied ; the claim of his merits has never been dishonoured. Shall we refuse his offer ? Shall we spurn his name ? Shall we turn away from that friend, and advocate, and patron, and

go there friendless and alone? Shall we seek to commend ourselves to a holy God by our own doings, and to stand there in our own attempts to vindicate our ways? Shall we spurn the robes of salvation which he proffers—so white, so pure, so full and flowing, and gird ourselves with the rags of our own righteousness?

#### VII. *The influence of faith in justification.*

In the last section, in showing how we are saved through the merits of Christ, it was remarked that the means by which we become interested in his merits, or by which they are made available to us, is *faith*. It was then proposed to go into a fuller explanation in the subsequent parts of this tract. That duty it remains now to perform.

The substance of the Christian doctrine on this subject is expressed in the following passages of Scripture:—"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." Rom. i. 16, 17. The doctrine of this passage is, that a man is considered just before God, and treated as such, not in virtue of his own works, but in virtue of his exercising faith in Christ. "For therein," that is, in the gospel, "the righteousness of God," or God's plan of regarding and treating men as righteous, "is revealed from faith to faith;" that is, by faith unto those who have faith, or who believe, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith," or those justified by faith shall have everlasting life. It is needless to prove at length that this is the settled doctrine of the New Testament. "Therefore we conclude," says the apostle in the third chapter of this epistle, (ver. 28,) "that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Again, "By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his



sight. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference." Rom. iii. 20-22. So the apostle Paul says again, "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ." Gal. ii. 16. In accordance with this, is the great doctrine which the Saviour taught his disciples to promulgate as comprising *all* that he designed them to teach: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark xvi. 15, 16. That is, there is no other method of being saved but by believing, or by faith, and if a man has not this, he must be lost.

Probably every one who has ever read these passages has been disposed to ask, Why is so much stress laid on *faith* in the plan of redemption? Why is it made so central, and so indispensable in the salvation of the soul? What inherent virtue is there in this act that has given it such a pre-eminence over all other virtues? What is there in this that should make it a substitute for all the good works that men can perform? Perhaps some will be disposed to add, that the system of Christianity is thus removed from all other systems, and is different from all the laws and principles on which men act in other things. Merit, in other cases, is not in accordance with a man's *belief*, but according to his virtues—his moral worth—and why should *faith* have such special eminence in the eye of God? The rewards of this life are not distributed according to a man's faith or credulity, and why should the rewards of heaven be? We judge of the excellency of a man's character not according to the readiness with which he embraces what is proposed to him for his credence, but usually somewhat in proportion to his caution and the slowness of his belief, and

why does religion require a man to hasten to believe that which is proposed to him, as if this were the chiefest of the virtues? When, also, a man is put on trial, he is acquitted, not because he exhibits an example of trusting in his judge or his advocate, but because he is able to vindicate his conduct; and why shall we not look for something analogous in religion? Why are pardon and hope; life and joy; heaven and glory; peace here and bliss hereafter; all made to depend on faith—"the centre and the circumference; the beginning, the middle, and the end, according to the gospel, of every virtue? These are questions which it is natural to ask; they are questions which the friend of Christianity should feel it to be a part of his vocation to answer. The relation or connection which these questions bear to the subject before us is this:—Supposing that man has no merit of his own, as has been shown, and that there are infinite merits in the Redeemer through which we may be saved, why is it proper that we should avail ourselves of those merits only through faith? Why should faith be the instrument by which we may be treated *as if* those merits were ours?

The answer to these questions is, that, in the circumstances of the case, faith constitutes a union with the Redeemer, of such a nature as to make it proper to treat us substantially as he himself is treated; that is, as righteous; to make it proper that we should share his happiness, his favour, his protection on earth, and his glory in heaven; that the union formed by faith between the soul and the Redeemer is so tender, so close, and so strong as to imply an identity of interest, and to make it certain and proper that the blessings descending on him should, according to their capacity and wants, descend on those who believe. It is meant that the particular *reason* why faith has been selected as the means of this is, that it constitutes a union  
\* more close, firm, and enduring than any other virtue, and

that it meets and overcomes more evils in the world than any other act of the mind would do. On this account, it is singled out from all other acts of the mind in the plan of justifying men. To many these remarks may appear abstract and obscure now. It is proposed, therefore, in a series of observations to show *why* faith is so important; why it is the very *cardo rerum*—the hinge of salvation.

One other preliminary remark should be made. It is that there is a great and essential difference between *faith* and *credulity*. We distinguish them accurately in common life; we fear that they are sometimes confounded when men think of religion.

The inquiry proposed embraces essentially the two following points:—Why *faith* is of so much importance in a work of salvation; and why faith in *Christ* is made so prominent and essential. The first point of inquiry is, why *faith* is of so much importance in a work of salvation. In reply to this inquiry let it be observed,

(1.) That faith acts an important part in the affairs of the world. Using the word in the sense of *confidence*, there is nothing else on which the welfare of society more depends, or which is more indispensable to its prosperous and harmonious relations. It enters into every thing, and we are every day and every hour acting under its influence, and depending on it as essential to all that we hold dear. It is the cement of families, of neighbourhoods, of governments, of nations. The faith of treaties, of compacts, of promises, of friendships, of affection, is that which holds the world together, and without which society would go to pieces. To loosen it at once, would be like loosening every rope in a ship, or unscrewing every fastening and bolt in a machine. It is by faith, or mutual confidence, that the relations of domestic life are maintained; that the harmony of a family is secured; that business, in a mercantile community, is carried on; that a banking institution effects

the purpose for which it was chartered ; or that a government can secure the ends for which it was instituted. It is by faith only that we derive lessons of valuable instruction from history, or act with reference to what is yet to come. If we had no more confidence in any of the testimonies of history than we have in the fabulous details of the dynasties of India, the mythological periods of Grecian history, or the legends of the saints, all past history would be utterly useless, for it would convey no certain lessons ; if we had no faith in the stability of the course of events—the rising of the sun, the moon and the stars ; the return of the seasons ; the continuance of the laws of magnetism, of gravitation, or of vegetation, we should form no plan for the future ; we should neither plant a field, nor build a ship, nor venture out on the ocean where we might soon be without sun, or star, or compass. We confide in our teachers, in a physician, a counsellor, a clergyman, and it would be impossible that the cause of education, jurisprudence or religion, could be maintained if there were no such confidence. The farmer of the Eastern States believes in the vast fertility of the West, of which he has heard, but which he has never seen, and, with his wife and children, leaves the graves of his fathers to seek that land on the strength of his faith ; and the merchant believes that there is such a place as Canton or Calcutta, though he has seen neither ; and on the strength of that faith would embark all his property in the same vessel, and stake the whole question about making a fortune in this world on his strong confidence that such places, of which he has heard, have an existence. In like manner we are exercising confidence in every thing. We believe the testimony of the historians, though we never saw Xenophon, or Thucydides, or witnessed the events of which they wrote ; we vote for the man whom we have never seen ; we confide in the bankers across the waters whom we never expect to behold. Were it not for this

unceasing confidence in the varied operations of faith, we could not get along for a single day or hour. The affairs of the world would at once stand still. The bands of society would at once become loosened, and every thing would fall into irretrievable confusion.

It is true, there may be much credulity in the world, and multitudes in all professions and relations in life are imposed on. But so, also, there is much counterfeit money, and many may be injured or ruined by it. But the existence of a circulating medium is indispensable, and there is by far more genuine than false coin at any time in the world, and any quantity of spurious coin does not render that valueless which is genuine. So any amount of credulity does not prove that it is improper that men should ever repose confidence in one another, or that all faith is valueless.

(2.) The second observation illustrating the importance of faith with reference to the subject before us is, that faith is the strongest conceivable bond of union between minds and hearts. It is, in fact, the cement of *all* unions, and without which all else is valueless. In friendships, in treaties, in national compacts, in social intercourse, in the tender domestic relations, it is *the* very bond of union, and there is nothing else that can be a substitute for it. The seal which is affixed to a letter that is sent to a friend does not make it secure because no one has power to break it, but because there is confidence in each postmaster through whose hands it may pass, and in each stranger or friend into whose hands it may happen to fall, that he will respect the seal, and will not break it. The seal which is appended to a will does not render it secure because no one has *power* to break it, but because the testator has confidence that his friends and that the courts of his country will respect his wishes when his mouth is forever closed



against the possibility of his declaring his desires, and his hand powerless to assert his rights.

Look into the relations of life. What is it that forms and preserves those numerous unions on which the very existence of society depends? What is the basis of the union of husband and wife, of parent and child, of brother and sister, of friend and friend? What is there but mutual confidence? And is it asked what is the strength of that? In answer to these questions an illustration may be employed, taken from the most tender relation in life. This illustration is used, because it is the very one more than once referred to on this subject in the Bible, and because it enters so vitally into the welfare of society. Here is a young man just entering on life. His character is fair; his profession is honourable; his person and standing are liable to no objection, and no suspicion—but what he *may* be yet no one earthly can tell, for no one can certainly predict about what a man will be, till he is tried. Here is a youthful female—the joy of her mother and the pride of her father's heart. She has been delicately trained; has a home that has every attraction; is secure there of unfailing friends as long as her father and mother shall live, and has ample means of support. She breaks all these ties; leaves the home of her childhood; bids adieu to father, mother, brothers, and sisters, and commits herself into the hands of this comparative stranger. A father's, and a mother's, and a brother's love she exchanges for his. Her hand, her heart, her property she gives to him. She pledges herself to go where he goes; to suffer what he suffers; to make his friends hers; to love him with an ardour with which she loves no other human being; to break away from every tie of country and home if he shall will it; and in a sense more absolute than exists in any other case, to commit her happiness into his hands. Every day and every hour that they will live, she is dependent on his prosperity, his virtue,

and his smiles for her happiness, and the moment his affections are withdrawn, or he ceases to be a virtuous man, her happiness is dead. If he is virtuous, faithful, and kind, she regrets not the act of confidence with which she gave him her heart and hand. But what if he trifles with her happiness? What if he always meets her with a frown? What if he proves false to his vows? What if he becomes a wretched drunkard? Now what is the foundation and the source of its strength? Confidence; and when that is gone domestic peace dies. She has made a sacrifice of her happiness, and her earthly felicity is a wreck.

Let another thought be suggested here. It is, that this union of confidence secures an *identity* in their destiny. They are one—one flesh, said the Saviour—and the same events will now affect both. Before this union the storm might have beat on one of them, and sunshine gladdened the path of the other. Now the storm and the sunshine come on both alike. The light that gladdens the eyes of the one is also a pleasant thing to the other; the star that rises propitiously on one, rises propitiously also on the path of the other. The blessings of peace and joy that greet the one, greet also the other. There is one heart, one pulsation, one breathing, one soul made up of the two. And so if calamity comes; if, under the roof where they are to abide, the pale destroyer shall come with stealthy foot-tread, and change the rose on the cheek of a smiling babe to the lily of death, it will be a scene in which both their hearts will bleed alike, and they will weep together over the open grave. If one is sad, both are sad; if one is poor, both are poor. Their union, one pre-eminently of mutual faith plighted before the altar, constitutes an identity in all the great events of life, and secures to both substantially the same treatment from the Great Disposer of all things. They share the same fortune; the same honour or disgrace; the same sorrows and the same joys; they are

wafted on to a port of bliss or are wrecked in the same vessel; they are greeted with the same welcome in life, they are buried in the same grave. It is easy to apply this illustration to the matter in hand.

(3.) The third illustration is, that faith is of such a nature that it is adapted to meet all the evils of the world. The idea is, that it has been made the hinge or turning point of salvation, because the want of it has been the source of all the calamities which man has suffered, and because, if this is restored, the evil of the world would be at an end.

The grand evil on earth, and the source of all subordinate evils, is a *want of confidence in God*. This was the evil at the start, that man reposed more confidence in the teachings of the tempter, than in the law of the Creator, and this has been the source of all our woe. Man has no confidence in his God. He does not believe that the Most High is qualified for universal empire; that he manages the affairs of the universe well; that his law is equal and just; that his dispensations are in accordance with equity; that his plan of salvation is wise. He does not show his confidence in him by yielding implicit obedience to his laws, or by submitting to his dispensations. He does not go to him and ask counsel of him in the darkneses and perplexities of life; he does not seek support in his arms in times of calamity. He does not commit his great interests to him, believing that he will be his guide through life, and that he will yet make "all things work together for good." He confides in other things. He confides in his own strength, till his strength fails; in his philosophy till it deludes and deceives him; in his fellow-men till they all betray him; in friends and kindred, till they drop into the grave; in his skill and sagacity, till he comes to a place in life where "the right hand loses its cunning." He confides in stocks and stones, in graven images, and fourfooted beasts and creeping things, but by nature he has no confidence in God.

This is the grand evil of the world; this the source of all our woes; for a want of confidence here produces the same kind of evils, though on a larger scale, as the same want everywhere. We have seen that the welfare of society depends on mutual confidence. Now, to see how wretched any society can possibly be, we have only to suppose the existence there of the same want of confidence which subsists between man and his Maker. If a perfectly malignant being wished to diffuse as much misery as possible through the world, all that he could desire would be to break up universal faith. He would go into a community, and with the touch of a magic wand would in a moment destroy all confidence in each merchant, bank and insurance office, and lawyer, and physician, and clergyman. He would go into each school, and destroy all confidence in the instructor. He would go into each family, and destroy everywhere the mutual confidence of husband and wife, and introduce universal distrust and jealousy. He would unsettle the faith of every child in his father, of every brother in his sister. What would be the result? He would at once arrest the wheels of commerce; put an end to business; make every professional man useless and wretched; take away sleep from the pillow of every husband and wife, and fill every family, and the whole community with heart-burnings, jealousies, contentions, and strifes. No man would know in whom to trust; no one could form a plan dependent in any manner on the fidelity of others; no one could be certain that any of his purposes of life could be effected. The scene at Babel would be reacted again all over the world, and worse disorder than that which followed from confounding the language of the people there, would pervade all classes and conditions of mankind. The remedy for such a state of things would be the restoration of mutual confidence. In such a condition of ill, nothing would have so far-reaching an effect. It would in fact *meet all those*

ills and make society harmonious and happy. The wheels of commerce, of government, of domestic peace, of public improvement, of education, would again roll on harmoniously, and happiness would again bless the world. The want of faith or confidence in God has produced all the ills on earth, of which those just supposed are but an emblem; the restoration of confidence in God would strike at the root of all those ills, and make this a happy world. It is this which makes heaven happy, where every being has faith in God and in all that dwell there; and with all our wants and sadnesses this too would be a happy world, if there were universal confidence in God. In our sorrows we should then have peace, for we should believe that all is well ordered; under our heavy burdens of life we should find support, for we would go and roll all on his arm; in all the dark and perplexing questions that now agitate us about the introduction of moral evil and the prevalence of iniquity, our minds would be calm, for we should feel that there was a reason for it all, and in the prospect of death—that which now makes us so sad—our hearts would find more than peace—we should utter the language of joy and triumph, for it would be only the coming of a messenger to bear us to a much loved Father's arms. The grand thing that needs to be done on earth to make this a happy world, is to restore universal confidence in God, and this is the whole aim of religion, this the object of the scheme of redemption. Hence the necessity of faith is laid at the foundation of the whole scheme; it is the cardinal thing in the plan of salvation. This restored, what a happy world, after all, would this be! For it is a beautiful world. It is full of the proofs of God's goodness and love. There are a thousand comforts that meet us every day and every night; and a thousand tender chords that should bind us to our Creator. If we confided in him as qualified for universal empire; if we felt that he was *fit* to manage the affairs of his own



world; if we believed that he will yet bring order out of confusion and light out of darkness; if we trusted that his law is good and his commandments holy, and if we would go to him with the confiding spirit with which a little child goes and tells all his troubles to his father, this would be still a happy world. For that grand undertaking of the almighty Father of us all, to restore unwavering confidence in himself, manifested in the Gospel, the world should be unfeignedly thankful, and one of the principal topics of praise on earth should be, that he has required faith as the very elementary principle of his religion.

(4.) A fourth remark, in explanation of the subject, is that faith is required, or is made the condition of justification, for this reason:—There is an obvious propriety that, where salvation is provided and offered, there should be some act on our part signifying our *acceptance* of it. If we are to be saved through the merits of Christ, there should be some reason on our part why we should be. There should be some act indicating our wish or our will; some expression of our desire in the case; something that shall serve to distinguish us from those who are not saved. It evidently would not be proper, it would not be consulting the nature which God has given us, to receive the race indiscriminately into heaven without any intimation of a wish to be saved, or to save one part and leave the other, unless there were something that would indicate in the one a desire to be saved, which did not exist in the case of the other. What would better show this than faith? What would be a better expression of a desire to be saved? What act would be more appropriate in *accepting* salvation; in the intimating of a wish that the benefits of the death of Christ might be ours? What would constitute a stronger bond between the soul and him than this; what would come nearer toward constituting that identity on which it is proper that those who are united should be treated alike? You are a

father ; you have two sons. They both become disobedient. They leave your house at their pleasure ; go where they choose ; are out at such hours as suit their convenience ; keep such company as they desire, and are wholly regardless of your laws. They heed neither your promises nor your threats, and they have gone so far that they have now no confidence in you. You have favours which you are willing to bestow on them. You would be willing to receive them to your house, and to treat them as sons, alike in your lifetime and in your will. But would you think it unreasonable that, as a condition of their being received and treated as sons, they should evince returning *confidence* in you ? And if one of them *should* return, and should ever onward manifest the confidence due from a son to a father, and the other should not, would you think it improper to make a distinction between them in your lifetime and in your will ? And would they and the world be at a loss for a *reason* why it was done ? The remark here is, that faith in Christ is the appropriate *act* by which we *accept* of the benefits of his work, and that this constitutes a difference between him who accepts of his salvation and him who does not ; and that this is a *reason* why the one should be treated *as if* he were interested in those benefits and the other not ; that is a reason why the one is justified and the other not.

Bearing in mind the remarks now made, that a restoration to confidence would meet innumerable evils in a family, in a commercial community, between neighbours and between nations, and that the restoration of confidence in God would meet all the evils under which this world labours now, I proceed to show why *faith in Christ* particularly is made so important as a condition of salvation. With reference to this, three remarks may be made :—

(1.) The first is, that we are to repose faith or confidence in Christ as authorized to negotiate the terms of reconciliation between God and man. The whole system of revealed

religion proceeds on the fact—a fact which is apparent without any revelation—that an alienation exists between God and man, or that man is in a state of revolt. It was with reference to this alienation that the Son of God came into the world to accomplish the most difficult of all undertakings, that of reconciling opposing minds, and of bringing them into harmony. On the one hand, there was the infinite mind of God, whose law had been violated, and whose government had been rejected and outraged, and whose threatenings had been disregarded; and on the other, there were countless millions of minds wholly alienated from the Creator. To bring the holy Creator and the millions of rebellious minds into harmony; to propose the terms on which God was willing to forgive sin; to make such arrangements as that he could consistently pardon; and to bring the minds of revolted men to a willingness to be reconciled, was the work undertaken by this great peace-maker.

But it is evident that this work could not be accomplished, unless *confidence* was reposed in him by both the parties of the unhappy controversy. In infinitely smaller matters, when nations are alienated, if a mediator proposes arrangements of peace, or if ambassadors are appointed to negotiate a peace, it is clear that the matter could not proceed a step unless there were confidence on both sides in the mediator or ambassadors.

Christ is a great mediator; a peace-maker between God and man. On the part of God, there was every reason to repose entire confidence in him in so great an undertaking, for he was his only begotten Son; eternally in his bosom, and loved, with an infinite love, before the foundation of the world. John xvii. 24. By him the worlds had been made; (John i. 3; Heb. i. 21;) and under him, with reference to the work of redemption, their affairs had been administered up to the time when he appeared in the flesh.

God the Father reposed unlimited confidence in him when he appointed him to be the mediator, and intrusted to him the execution of the great purpose of reconciling the world again to the divine government. This confidence reposed in Christ in the work of mediation, is often referred to in the New Testament, by the Saviour himself, and by the sacred penmen: "This is my beloved Son," was declared from heaven at his baptism, "in whom I am well pleased." Matt. iii. 17. "Father," said the Saviour, just before his death, "glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." John xii. 28. "Thou hast given him power," said he again, "over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." John xvii. 2. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye therefore and teach all nations." Matt. xxviii. 18, 19. "I am the way," said he, "and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." John xiv. 6. So we are told, that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. xi. 5.

These things show the degree of confidence which the Father reposed in him in the work of mediation—intrusting to him the message of mercy; appointing him to convey it to men; and endowing him *as* Mediator, with all the power and authority which were requisite to accomplish so great a work.

But confidence in him is not less required in regard to the other party than by him who had appointed him. It is clear that, unless we have confidence in him as the messenger and ambassador of God; unless we regard him as sent from heaven, and as authorized to propose terms of reconciliation; unless we feel that he can make a *definite arrangement*, and that what he proposes will be sanctioned by God; unless we feel that he is *authorized* to propose terms of pardon, and to declare our sins forgiven, and to pronounce us

accepted and justified, it would be impossible for us to avail ourselves of any arrangement for salvation through him. We should feel that we were trifling with a great subject; and in our serious moments, when we thought of the great interests at stake, we should be in no humour to trifle. None of *us* would seriously think of embracing *any* terms of reconciliation with God proposed by Mohammed, or Zoroaster, or Confucius; by Lord Herbert or Mr. Hume; for we do not suppose that any of these men were *authorized* to propose terms of salvation. We have no confidence in them as ambassadors of God, whatever we may think of them in other respects. The primary ground of *faith*, therefore, in Christ, is, that we have confidence in him as a mediator, an ambassador, a peace-maker; as authorized to propose to us the *terms* on which peace may be obtained with our offended Creator. "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." John viii. 24.

(2.) The second remark to which we referred, showing specifically why faith in Christ is demanded, is, that it is by his agency and merits only that we can be received into the favour of God. He came not only to *bring* the message of reconciliation, and to *propose* the terms, but to *do* and to *suffer* whatever was necessary to be done, in order that we might be accepted of the Father, or in order that we might be saved consistently with the interests of justice. The case somewhat resembles what it would be in the instance of an ambassador coming to negotiate a peace who should not only come to propose the *terms*, but should actually have in his possession that which alone could be regarded as a reparation for wrong done by one of the parties to the other, and who should come not only to persuade the party which had done the wrong to be willing to be reconciled, but also to avail itself of what he was ready to *furnish* to repair all the evil done, and to satisfy the other party. In such a case, it would not be unreasonable to ask *confidence* in him-



self, or to make this one of the conditions by which the favour might be available. In fact, it could not be consistently made available in any other way, or on any other conditions, and, unless there were faith in him, the negotiation could proceed no further.

Thus we are required to exercise faith in the Lord Jesus. We are destitute of merit. We have violated the law of God, and can do nothing to repair the wrong. We are debtors, to an incalculable amount, to justice; and we have nothing with which to pay the debt. We can do absolutely nothing to vindicate our own conduct; to undo the evils that we have done; to make up for the dishonour which we have put on the law of God; to atone for our thousands of faults and follies. At this point the Son of God appears, and he comes with the assurance that he has himself perfectly obeyed the law, and has honoured it as fully as it can be honoured by obedience; that he has suffered a most bitter death—a death aggravated by every form of cruelty—as an expiation for our sins; that he will become the guarantee or surety that the law shall suffer no dishonour if we are saved; that no injury shall result from our pardon, and that, in fact, all the good effects have been secured by his death which *could be* by our being doomed to bear the penalty of the law ourselves; and that all that is needful for us now is to become united to him by an indissoluble bond to put ourselves under his protection; and to be so identified with him that it will be proper to treat us *as if* we had personally obeyed the law, or borne its penalty. That which will constitute the *closest* union in the case, and which will do most to render this identity of treatment proper, is confidence in him as our Saviour, and reliance on his merits, or *faith*.

(3.) The third remark necessary to explain the subject, or to show why faith in Christ is made the turning point of justification and salvation is, that the act of believing in

Christ is made in circumstances and in a manner indicating *confidence* of the highest kind that ever exists in the human bosom, constituting a union of the closest conceivable nature. It is an act so identifying the soul and the Saviour as to make it proper that the same treatment which the Redeemer receives should in this measure be received by his people, or that in the divine treatment they should be practically regarded as *one*. The circumstances are these:—

(a) The sinner feels that he is lost and ruined. He is made sensible that he is guilty before God, and that he has no claim to his mercy. His heart is evil; his life has been evil; his whole soul is evil. If justice were done him, he feels that he would be forever banished from God and heaven. Yet he feels that he has a soul of infinite value. It is to endure forever. It is capable, in the long eternity before it, of suffering more than the aggregate of all the sorrows that have yet been endured on earth, and in hell. It is capable, also, in that infinite duration, of enjoying more than the aggregate of bliss of all that has been experienced on earth united with all that has been known in heaven. A boundless eternity is before the trembling sinner, and infinite interests are at stake.

(b) He despairs of salvation in himself. He feels now that he has no power to rescue his soul from death. He cannot confide in his own arm, or in the arm of any mortal. He has tried every method of salvation; every way of obtaining peace of conscience; every plan that proposed security to his soul, but in vain. He stands now a lost and ruined being trembling on the shores of eternity. The boundless ocean spreads out before him. Clouds and darkness rest upon it. He has deserved no mercy; he has no claim on God to be his guide and protector; he can urge no reason why he should be admitted to a world of peace.

(c) In these sad and perilous circumstances, he commits his soul with all its infinite and eternal interests, into the

hands of the Lord Jesus. By a simple act of faith he embraces him as his Saviour, his friend, his sacrifice, his advocate. Renouncing all confidence in his own merit, he resolves to rely on the merit of Christ; abandoning every plea on the ground of what he has himself done, he resolves to urge the merits of the Saviour as his plea, and forsaking forever all reliance for salvation on birth or blood; on moral virtues or intellectual attainments; on rank in life or the commendation of friends; on the goodness of his own heart or on forms in religion, he stakes his own everlasting interest and the question of his final salvation on the belief that there is a Saviour, and that Jesus is the Son of God, and that he is able and willing to save him. He is willing to risk the issue on this belief, and he who was a moment before trembling on the verge of hell *as if* there were no hope, now calmly turns the eye to heaven, and smiles through his tears and says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

(d) This is a wonderful act of confidence. That is great confidence which is evinced when a drowning man seizes a rope that is thrown to him, and suspends the question of his safety on the belief that you can draw him to the shore. That would be great confidence which the man who was shipwrecked, and who had clambered up a projecting rock above the reach of the waves, should evince if he would fasten a rope let down from above around his body, and swing off over the raging billows, trusting to the rope and the strength of those above to draw him up. And that is great confidence in a case already referred to where a delicately framed youthful female leaves her mother and father and commits herself, for weal or wo, into the hands of a comparative stranger. But such acts are not equal to that by which the dying soul commits itself to the Saviour. They will hardly do for an illustration. For what are the

raging waves of the ocean compared with the rolling fires of the world of despair? What is the perilled death of the body compared with the death of the soul? What are all the temporal interests which youth, or beauty, or virtue can commit to another here, compared with those eternal interests which are intrusted to the Son of God? It remains then only to add :

(e) That in virtue of such a union there *should be* identity of treatment. So we saw in the illustration of the husband and wife, where the union between them led on common sorrows and common joys ; common successes and common reverses ; common sunshine and common shade. Much more should it be so in the more tender and close union of the soul to the Saviour by the act of faith. They become one. He is the “vine,” they are the “branches ;” he the “head,” they the “members ;” he lives in them and dwells in them. He is “Christ in us the hope of glory.” “We are members of his body, his flesh, and his bones.” “I live,” says the apostle, “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” “Because I live,” said the Saviour, “ye shall live also.” Through all life’s future scenes his people will be treated as he was ; and the union with him is so close that it introduces them to common joys and triumphs with him forever. They will be made happy because the same blessings that descend on the “head” will flow to all the “members.”

In view of these remarks, the following thoughts may be suggested :—

(1.) The simplicity and ease of the way of salvation in the Gospel are remarkable. The leading thing required of him who would be saved is faith or confidence in the Redeemer. Thus Paul said to the trembling jailer at Philippi, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Acts xvi. 31. So again in the Epistle to the Romans, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and

shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Rom. x. 9, 10. Here, as everywhere in the New Testament, salvation is represented as easy. The terms are as simple as possible. There is no requisition of our attempting to obey the whole law of God as a condition of salvation; no demand on us to offer costly sacrifices, or to make pilgrimages to a distant shrine, or to practise penances and fastings, or to lacerate the body, or to attempt to work out a righteousness by conformity to external forms, or by union to a particular church. The simple, the single thing demanded is faith on the Son of God. If man has this, he is safe. No matter what his past life has been; no matter what his complexion, rank, or apparel; no matter where he lives or dies; no matter whether he worships in a splendid temple or under the open vault of heaven, and no matter whether his body rests in consecrated ground or amid the corals of the ocean, he is a child of God and an heir of the kingdom. Whatever may be said of this plan of salvation, it cannot be said that it is not sufficiently simple, and that it does not breathe a spirit of benignity toward the lost and ruined children of men. The infidel cannot object that God has not adapted it to the condition of human nature at it is—made up, for the most part, of the ignorant, the down-trodden, and of children; nor that it has required more of any man than the human powers can render. Yet,

(2) While thus simple and easy, it is on the great principles which we see everywhere prevail. There is required in salvation that which keeps the social world together, and causes human things to move on in harmony—that without which all the interests of man would be a wreck. There is required that which would arrest all human ills, and make



this still a happy world—*confidence in our God*. Man wants but this to make him a happy being here; he will want but this to make him happy forever. As confidence is the great principle which cements society, so it was indispensable in religion that confidence in God should be restored. We cannot conceive that a human being could be saved without faith. Even if it had not been distinctly and formally *required in the plan*, it is impossible to conceive that there could have been salvation without it. The very process of returning to God from our wanderings implies returning confidence in him—for how or why should the sinner return to him if he has no confidence in him? And how could he be happy in heaven if he had no confidence in God? What would heaven be if there were the same distrust of the Deity, and the same jarring opinions, and the same alienation from him, and the same doubt of his being, his justice, and his goodness there which exist on earth? The plan of salvation by faith is laid in the deepest philosophy—and is based on the irreversible nature of things.

(3.) The subject suggests a remark on the nature and aims of infidelity. Men often think that unbelief is a harmless thing. They sometimes regard it as a special proof of meritorious independence to be an infidel. They pride themselves on their philosophy, and their freedom from vulgar prejudices and priestcraft—perhaps on their freedom from the prejudices instilled by a pious parent, a pastor, or a Sunday-school teacher. They consider the denunciations of unbelief in the gospel as singularly harsh, and use no measured terms in expressing their abhorrence of a system which denounces the eternal pains of hell on a man because he will not believe. The want of faith, say they, is a harmless or a meritorious thing. But are you connected with a bank? Would you think that a harmless effort in a daily

paper which should attempt to unsettle the confidence of the community in your institution? Have you a character for virtue, which you have secured by years of toil, and of upright deportment? Is that a harmless report in the community which tends to destroy all confidence in that character? Are you a father? Is it a harmless effort of your neighbour when he attempts to unsettle the confidence of your own children in your virtue? Are you a husband? Is he a harmless man who shall aim to unsettle your faith in the wife of your bosom, and produce between you and her an utter want of confidence? And is there no evil in that state of mind where there is no confidence in God that rules on high—the God that made us, and that holds our destiny in his hands? Is it nothing to unsettle the faith of man in his God, and to introduce universal distrust in his government? Is it nothing to inculcate or cherish the thought that the governor of the world is a dark, malignant, harsh, and severe being, and to alienate the affections of creation from its God? Let the history of the earth answer. All our evils began in that unhappy moment when our first parents lost their confidence in their God. “Loss of Eden,” toil, sweat, despair, perplexity and death, tell what the evil was. Calamities have rolled along in black and angry surges, and the dark flood still swells and heaves upon the earth. Peace will be restored and paradise regained only when man is restored to confidence in his God—and this is the grand and glorious work of the gospel. This done in any heart, and its “peace becomes as a river and its righteousness as the waves of the sea.” This done all over the earth, and millennial joy will visit the nations. This done, as successive individuals or generations leave the world, death is disarmed of his sting, for the departing soul leaves with full assurance of faith on the Saviour,

VIII. *The bearing and importance of the doctrine of justification by faith.*

The points which have been illustrated in the previous sections are the following :—The importance of the inquiry how man can be justified with God ; the fact that man cannot justify or vindicate himself by denying the truth of the charges against him ; the fact that he cannot do it by showing that he had a right to do as he has done ; the fact that he cannot merit salvation ; what is to be understood by the merits of Christ ; in what sense we are justified by the merits of Christ ; and the agency of faith in our justification. It is proposed now, in the conclusion of the subject, to refer to some historical illustrations of the value and influence of the doctrine of justification by faith, and to show why it has the place which history has assigned it.

In illustrating the value and influence of the doctrine as shown by history, three periods of the world may be briefly referred to.

(1.) The first is the age of the apostles, when, perhaps, the effect of the doctrine of justification by faith was more vividly seen than it has ever been since. That this was the doctrine which Paul preached ; which he made prominent in his writings ; and which he everywhere defended, no one acquainted with his history can for a moment doubt. It would be needless here to transcribe the passages of his writings which declare his views on this point ; or which show how earnestly he expressed his convictions of its truth and importance. Everywhere he maintained that a man is not justified by the deeds of the law, but by the righteousness of faith ; that we are saved not by works of righteousness which we have done ; that they that are under the law are under the curse ; and that they who are justified by faith have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. In the most earnest and emphatic manner he abjured all dependence on his own merits for salvation ; disclaimed all

reliance on the extraordinary zeal for religion which he had manifested in early life, and on his own blameless outward deportment, and declared it now to be the grand purpose of his soul to "know Christ, and to be found in him, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil. iii. 9. In this he coincided with all the other apostles, who taught, as he did, that no reliance was to be placed on outward forms of religion, on good works, on an amiable character, or on alms, as the ground of salvation. It was then that the doctrine of simple dependence on Christ for salvation went forth with freshness and with power. It was unencumbered by any attending doctrine of a different character to fetter its movements; or to hinder its progress through the world. There was no necessity proclaimed of depending on rites or forms of religion; no reverence for sacred places inculcated as necessary to salvation; no connection with a particular church organized under a peculiar ministry, was declared to be essential; no saving efficacy was attributed to sacraments and to alms; no merits of the holy men of other ages could be depended upon to make up the deficiency of those who sought to be saved; no promise was held out that the dead might be saved through the extraordinary sacrifices and benevolence of the living. The naked doctrine of justification by faith in Christ stood out before the world; fresh in its youthful vigour; with no trappings or ornaments to hide and obscure it; a simple, solemn, sublime truth that all might appreciate and that might be available to all. This was then the sword of the spirit—slaying human pride; cutting down the self-righteousness of men; prostrating the great and the mean, the learned and the unlearned, the patrician and the plebeian, the master and the slave, the man in purple and the man in rags, alike—a sword whose keenness was not rendered useless then by being hid in a gorgeous scabbard.

The doctrine thus promulgated by the apostle stood opposed to the prevailing views of all the world. It was opposed to all the aims of the Pharisees—the essential tenet of whose religion was expressed graphically and honestly by one of their own number, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.” It stood opposed to all the views of the Sadducees, who held to the necessity of *no* kind of religion, denying the whole doctrine of the future state. It stood opposed to the Essenes, the remaining Jewish sect, who sought to work out their salvation by extraordinary fastings and privations, and by exclusion from contact with the world. It stood opposed to the whole system of sacrifices among the heathen, seeking to propitiate the gods, and to render themselves accepted by dependence on the forms of religion; and it was at variance with all the views of philosophy—the pride of the Stoic, confident in his own righteousness; the licentiousness of the Epicurean, justifying his own voluptuousness; and the self-complacency of the sage, who relied on his own wisdom. An apostle could go nowhere where the doctrine would not come in conflict with all the prevailing views in regard to the way in which men might be saved. Yet no one now can be ignorant of the effect of this doctrine as promulgated by the apostles. It changed the religion of the world, for Christianity made no other advances than as it taught men to renounce every other ground of dependence and to rely for salvation solely on the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. It had no martial power by which to make its way; it had no influence derived from name and rank to enforce its claim; it had no authority derived from a venerable antiquity on which to rely; it had no gorgeous and imposing forms to enable it to command the respect of those who had worshipped in the Parthenon or the Pantheon; it had no claims to any new discoveries in philosophy. It had but *one* thing that was new, great, improving, commanding, and that was the



announcement of Christ crucified, and the fact that men everywhere might now be justified by the merits of his atoning blood. Never has any truth on any subject stood more by itself, to make its own way without adventitious aid, than this did in the hands of the Christian apostles, and never before had any single truth on any subject produced such changes in the world.

(2.) The second fact, to which reference will be made, is the state of the world when the doctrine of justification by faith was obscured and almost extinguished in the Church. It soon began to be obscured. Very early the professed friends of religion began to lose sight of it. So strong in the human mind is the love of pomp and ceremony and form; so attached is man to splendour and show in religion as in every thing else; so prone is the heart to rely on its own doings; and so reluctant is the sinner everywhere to depend for salvation on the righteousness of another, that this doctrine gradually died away and almost ceased to be remembered in the church. Then arose the system which spread night all over the Christian world—the night of ignorance, error, superstition, and crime—a night deepening for ages till it terminated in the consummate depravity of the Papacy under Alexander VI. Under this forgetfulness of the doctrine of justification by faith, or of salvation by simple dependence on Christ crucified, arose the universal respect for sacred places and orders of men; zeal for splendid temples of worship and for gorgeous ceremonies; extraordinary veneration for the sepulchres of saints, and for their holy remains; pilgrimages to the holy land; the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and of absolution of sins by the imposition of holy hands; the belief that grace was imparted by sacraments administered by a priesthood; the doctrine that the merits of the saints of other days were garnered up for the benefit of future ages and placed at the disposal of the Church; the multiplication of sacraments

with saving efficacy attributed to them all, and the belief of a peculiar sacredness attached to ground consecrated to the burial of the dead. All these were features of one great system. They had *some* relation to Christianity, and had grown in part out of the abuse of its doctrines. But though various, they were arranged evidently under the auspices of one master mind and with the same end in view. That was to render nugatory the doctrine of justification by faith, and to substitute in its place the doctrine of salvation by works. It was, indeed, salvation by works connected with the religion of Christ, and was a different system from that of the Pharisee who expected to be saved by conformity to the law of Moses; or the Grecian philosopher who hoped to reach heaven by the purity of his doctrine and his morals; or the degraded pagan who relied on the blood of his sacrifices; or the man now who relies on his own honesty and fidelity in the various relations of life; but it was essentially the same system. It excluded the simple dependence of the soul on the Lord Jesus for salvation, and substituted in its stead a reliance on human merit.

The effect was seen in the darkness, sin, and corruption of Europe before the Reformation. Every feature of the state of things in the "dark ages" can be traced to an obscuring of the great doctrine of justification by faith. Every advance of society into that deep and deepening gloom was connected with some loosening of its hold on that doctrine, and the substitution of something else in its place, until the hold was entirely gone, and Europe was plunged in total night.

(3.) The third historical fact, therefore, to be referred to, is the effect which the recovery and restoration of this doctrine had on the Church and the world at the period of the Reformation. To those who have studied the history of that period, as all Protestants should do, it is unnecessary to say that this was the elementary doctrine—the central

view—the starting point—in the whole of that glorious revolution. This was the great truth that dawned on the mind of Luther, and which led to all that he attempted and accomplished for the restoration of the Church to its primitive purity, and it occupied an equally central position in the view of all his fellow-labourers. Three times was the doctrine of justification by faith brought before the mind of Luther, with the same sort of power which it had when promulgated by the apostles, and with such energy as to rouse all that was great in his soul into life. The first was when he was a monk in his cell. He had found a copy of the Bible, and he began to study it and to lecture on it. He commenced with the Psalms, but soon passed to the Epistle to the Romans. One day having proceeded as far as the seventeenth verse of the first chapter, the words quoted from Habakkuk—“The just shall live by faith”—arrested his attention. A new thought struck him. A new way of salvation opened before his mind. A new light shone upon his heart, and the words “the just shall live by faith” seemed never to leave him. The second instance was when he first visited Rome. These words followed him and lingered on his ear. One of his first impressions was that he was now in the very place to which Paul had addressed these words in his epistle. Yet in that city how were they obscured and unknown! On every hand were arrangements for being justified by works—by forms and ceremonies; by pomp and pageantry; by the merits of the saints, and by penance. What a total obscuration of the great doctrine which Paul had taught in the letter to the Church there, and which he had himself doubtless taught when he had dwelt in that city! The third instance in which these words were brought to the heart of Luther was more impressive still. “One day wishing to obtain an indulgence promised by the pope to any one who should ascend on his knees what is called

'*Pilate's stair-case*,' the poor Saxon monk was slowly climbing those steps which they told him had been miraculously transported from Jerusalem to Rome. But while he was going through this meritorious work he thought he heard a voice, like thunder, speaking from the depths of his heart, '*The just shall live by faith.*' He started up in terror on the steps up which he had been crawling; he was horrified at himself; and, struck with shame for the degradation to which superstition had debased him, he fled from the scene of his folly. This powerful text had a mysterious influence on the life of Luther. It was a creative word for the Reformer and for the Reformation."—*D'Aubigné*. It was this truth that wrought out the Reformation: and whatever there was in that work that is valuable and precious; whatever there was to shed a benign influence on literature, liberty and morals; whatever there was to spread pure religion over Switzerland, or Germany, or England, or ultimately over our own land, and then by a reflex influence on Asia Minor, on Palestine, on the palmy East, on dark Africa, and on the islands of the sea, is to be traced to those moments when this text broke with so much living power on the soul of Luther:—"The just shall live by faith." It became with him an elementary truth, that the doctrine of justification by faith was the "article of the standing or the falling church"—the very *joint* or *hinge* (*articulus*) on which the whole depended.\* To that doctrine we owe, in its various developments, all that we value in this Protestant land, and all that distinguishes us in religion from what Europe was in the days of Alexander VI. and Leo X.; and there is not an interest of religion, liberty, or learning, which has not been moulded by it more than by any other single cause. Our modes of worship; our readiness to spread the Bible; our freedom of discussion;

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\* "*Articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiæ.*"

our general diffusion of intelligence; our untrammelled press; our separation of religion from the state; our societies for the spread of the gospel; our blessed and glorious revivals; our deliverance from superstition, and from the tyranny of a priesthood, and from the corruptions and abominations of the monastic system, and from the debasement of penance and pilgrimages, are all to be traced to the power of this single truth that blazed with such an intensity on the soul of the poor Saxon monk. Such being some of the facts in the case, let us,

I. Inquire why this doctrine has this importance and power. This will be seen if we can trace its connection with what it has been undeniably everywhere united with—a religion of deep spirituality; of simplicity of worship; of deadness to the world; of freedom of opinion; of liberal views, and of great and cheerful sacrifices for the good of mankind. There are but two systems of religion on the earth: the one is that of self-righteousness; the other that of salvation by the merits of Christ; the one that of men who attempt, in various ways, to justify themselves before God; the other, that of those who seek to be justified through the righteousness of the Redeemer. The bearing and importance of the latter, in contrast with the former, is the point now before us.

(1.) This doctrine of justification by faith has a power of reaching the soul and of calling forth every active energy of our nature which the other system never can have. It leaves the impression that the soul is of vast value; that religion is of inestimable importance; that the grand purpose of living should be religion. The reason of this, which may not at once be apparent, is, that it finds the soul in such a state, wherever it is embraced, that it arouses all that is thrilling, and vast, and momentous in the soul itself, and in its hopes and relations. The language which the doctrine of justification by faith addresses to each individual is this:



“ You are a lost sinner. You have no righteousness of your own. You never will have any. Your heart is by nature depraved, and your whole past life has been evil. In all that you have done, you have done nothing to merit the favour of God, or even to commend yourself to his approbation. All your righteousness is as filthy rags. All your outward forms of religion; your fastings, penance, and vows; your amiableness of character, your honesty, your integrity, your pride of birth and station, are all to pass for nothing before God in the matter of justification. Nor can you hope of yourself to do any thing more in the future that will commend you to God than you have done in the past. No form of religion; no flood of tears; no framing of the life by an outward law; no acts of self-denial; no fastings, prayers, or almsgivings can wipe away the deep stains of past guilt on the soul, or constitute an expiation for what you have done. In this state you are near the grave, and just over the world of wo. A moment might cut you off from the land of the living, and from the possibility of being saved. In this state you are wholly dependent on the sovereign mercy of God. You *may* be saved, but not by works of righteousness of your own. You *may* be saved, but it must be by renouncing all dependence on your own righteousness forever. You *may* be saved, but it must be wholly by the merits of another. Kings, sages, philosophers, priests, poets, warriors, knights, senators, judges; the gay, the accomplished, the rich, the poor, the vile, the bond, the free; all lie on a level before God. You *may be* saved; but it will only be by your making up the mind to a willingness to be saved in the same way as the vilest of the species, and to stand before the throne clothed in the same robes of salvation that shall adorn the most debased and down-trodden of the human race. Now it is easy to conceive, even for those who have not experienced this, that such a religion must

have the elements of great *power* of some kind. It can make its way only by sufficient power to crush the pride of man ; to bring down his lofty thoughts ; to humble him in the dust, and then by imparting life where there was none. There is nothing negative and tame about it. It has living energy through all this process. No man reaches the position of self-abasement and self-renunciation where this doctrine finds him, without a struggle with his own pride. To come down there and to lie thus low before God, is the result of mighty power on a proud man's soul, and is no neutral or unmeaning thing. It is not the work of ease and of effeminacy, and the business of a holiday, for a man to renounce all his own righteousness, and to be willing to acknowledge, before heaven, and earth, and hell, that he is so great a sinner that he ought to be excluded from heaven, and banished from the earth and be doomed to unspeakable torments forever in hell. And it is not an unmeaning thing when in this state a voice from heaven bids him rise from the dust, and go forth a pardoned man, a renovated being, a child of God, an heir of heaven.

Accordingly this *is* the doctrine which arouses the world. It was this which produced the commotions in the apostolic times, when it was said, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." It was this which produced so much excitement at Jerusalem, at Antioch, at Philippi. It was this which aroused Europe in the Reformation. It is this whose power is seen in every revival of religion. It is this whose energy is felt in the efforts made to carry religion around the globe.

To illustrate what has been now said, reference may be made to the case of two individuals who have stated the effect of this doctrine on their own minds. The first is that of the apostle Paul. It is found in the epistle to the Philippians. "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more : circumcised

the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.* Chap. iii. 4-8. The other is a record of Luther's feelings by himself when he was first made to understand this doctrine. "Though as a monk," says he, "I was holy and irreproachable, my conscience was still filled with trouble and torment. I could not endure the expression—'The righteous justice of God.' I did not love that just and holy Being who punishes sinners. I felt a secret anger against him; I hated him because, not satisfied with terrifying by his law and by the miseries of life poor creatures already ruined by original sin, he aggravated our sufferings by the gospel. But when by the Spirit of God I understood these words—when I learnt how the justification of the sinner proceeds from God's mere mercy by the way of faith—then I felt myself born again as a new man, and I entered by an open door into the very paradise of God. From that hour I saw the precious and Holy Scriptures with new eyes. I went through the whole Bible. I collected a multitude of passages which taught me what the work of God was. And as I had before heartily hated the expression, 'The righteousness of God,' I began from that time to value and to love it as the sweetest and most consolatory truth. Truly this text of St. Paul was to me as the very gate of heaven." —*D' Aubigné.*

To a soul thus lost and ruined, this doctrine always has this power. To others it has neither power nor beauty, nor can we hope that it will make its way among men except where the soul is deeply aroused on the subject of religion. Then it is what it is so often said to be in the Scriptures,

“The power of God :” it is His mighty energy quickening the soul that was dead in sin to newness of life.

(2.) The second remark illustrating its bearing and importance, will be drawn from the contrast of this doctrine with the opposite. It has already been observed that there are, in fact, but two kinds of religion on the earth, that of self-righteousness and that of dependence on another for salvation; that in which man attempts to justify himself, and that in which he relies for justification on the merits of the Son of God. These systems divide the world; for, however numerous may be the methods by which men attempt to save themselves, they all have this essential characteristic, that they are systems of self-righteousness. What are the characteristics of these two systems? What would be the tendency of each of them? Let them be put in contrast, and what must be the effect of each of them? The effect of the one—of the plan of justification by faith—we have already in part seen. Its obvious tendency must be to produce humility, penitence, gratitude, a simple reliance on the Saviour, a disposition to make him all in all in religion. What are the effects of the opposite system? They must be such as these:—

(a) Pride. “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are,” is its language all over the world.

(b) A multiplication of forms, and a reliance on them. Religion becomes an *outward* thing, not a work of the heart. So it was with the Pharisees, the Greeks, the Romans; so it is now in the pagan world, among Moham-medans, and in all the perverted forms of Christianity. It matters little what the outward form is; but where the doctrine of justification is obscured or unknown, religion *must* degenerate into heartless forms. It makes up for its want of vital power by the multiplication of rites and ceremonies. It adds a new ceremony for every step of departure from

the doctrine of justification by faith ; it attaches an additional sacredness to them as this doctrine is obscured, and where this is wholly lost out of view, religion becomes merely a punctilious performance of imposing rites, a careful observance of forms. A man, when he thinks of death and the judgment, *must* have *some* righteousness on which to rely. If it be not that of the Saviour, and if it be the pretence of religion at all, it must be that consisting of a sacred reverence for forms.

(c) The denial of the doctrine of justification by faith will be always attended with superstition. There will be an attempt to merit heaven by reverencing dead men's bones, by pilgrimages, by bodily torture, by seclusion from the world, by garnishing the sepulchres of the righteous, and by imploring the intercession of departed saints. The world must make up its mind to have the doctrine of justification by faith held in its purity, or to have a religion of superstition substituted in its place. One or the other has prevailed always ; one has always excluded the other ; the suppression of the one has been the occasion of the introduction of the other ; and one or the other will live to the end of time. The question is now before this country whether we shall cling to the great doctrine of justification by faith, or whether we shall go abroad and import all the superstitions of heathenism, whether original or baptized at Rome ; whether we shall adhere to the grand truth which was the element in the Reformation, or take Christianity, so called, as it was in the days of Alexander VI. and Leo X.

(d) The system which denies this doctrine has been, from some cause, an exclusive and a persecuting system. To whatever this fact may be traced, of the fact itself there can be no doubt. The history of the world has confirmed it, and that history has taught us that if we would be free from the evils of an exclusive and a persecuting system, we



must hold in its simplicity and its purity the great doctrine of justification by faith.

(3.) A third thing illustrating its bearing and importance, is the fact that it is connected with freedom of thought and the advancement of society. The fact here is more apparent than the reason of it. No one acquainted with history will dispute the fact that the doctrine of justification by faith has been held with the most simplicity and purity in the times when freedom of thought has most prevailed and in the lands most characterized for it. And no one can doubt that the denial of the doctrine, and the denial of the right of free inquiry, have gone together. It was the same system, which denied by all its arrangements the doctrine of justification by faith, which imprisoned Galileo. The Inquisition grew up in lands where this doctrine was denied, and has flourished there only, and could live nowhere else. The proclamation of this doctrine in Europe by Luther and his fellow-labourers unfettered the human mind and abolished the Inquisition; and nothing can be clearer than that no circumstances could ever arise in any land in which the doctrine of justification by simple faith in Christ is held in which such an institution could be established; and we may be certain that, as long as we can assert this doctrine in its purity throughout all our borders, we shall be free from thumb-screws, and racks, and *auto-da-fès*, and dark dungeons made to incarcerate the advocate of any religious belief. Whatever *else* we may be subjected to, this doctrine will be a palladium to us, not fabled as was the image of Minerva, but a reality to secure for us the protection of heaven.

The *reasons* of the fact which is now adverted to, would be found in such considerations as these:—That in this doctrine there is nothing which we wish to conceal; that it depends for its support on nothing which may not be fully

examined; that it recognises everywhere the equality of men; that it asks no patronage from the state; that it relies for its advancement on its own simple power *as truth*—as commending itself to the conscience and the reason of mankind, and as finding a response in the soul of every man who feels that he is a sinner. The support of the other system is to be found in just the opposite of these things. It cloaks itself in mystery. It seeks to establish the claims of a priesthood composed of a superior order of men, and this *must* be done on arguments that will not bear the light. It is, and must be sustained by the power of the state. It loves a religion of *blind believing* rather than of *reasoning*. It is identified with all that human ingenuity can devise to substitute a righteousness in the place of that by faith in the Saviour. It is identified with interest—where the procuring of absolution becomes a matter of bargain and sale. And it is conscious that the free examination of its claims would show how baseless is the fabric on which it stands, and the worthlessness of all the devices which have been originated to enable man to work out a righteousness of his own. Without pursuing these thoughts further, one other remark may be added. It is

(4.) That the doctrine of justification by faith is connected with liberality in religion. We have seen what is the character, in this respect, of the opposite system. It is essential to every other system that it *be* illiberal and exclusive. The reason is this. According to every such system, grace is conveyed *only* through a certain channel. There are certain men who alone are appointed to dispense it; it is to be obtained only in union with a certain ecclesiastical connection, and in the performance of certain specified rites and ceremonies. But none of these things are essential to the doctrine of justification by faith. It is a direct concern between the soul and its

Saviour. It practically removes every human being from any participation in obtaining for the sinner the favour of God. However the ministers of religion may have been instrumental in arousing the attention of the soul to its guilt and danger, or in pointing the way to the cross, yet the transaction is one where all foreign agency and all human holiness of office are excluded. It is not essential whether the minister officiates with or without a surplice; whether in a plain "meeting-house" or a magnificent cathedral; whether he can trace his commission through the apostolic succession or not; whether his doctrines can or cannot be sustained by synods and councils; nay, whether there *be* any minister of religion at all, for the soul may be justified by simple faith in the Lord Jesus. The worshipper may be a Cameronian on the hills of Scotland under the open heaven; or a man who has strayed somehow into a conventicle; or a wandering savage who is made to listen, to attend, to be enraptured, till his eyes pour forth tears under the preaching of some humble missionary on whose head the hands of a mitred prelate have never been laid, and there shall be all the elements of the doctrine of justification. What has occurred to him on the hills, or in the woods, or in a school-house, or in a church, he feels *may* occur anywhere else in the same way. It will not become then *essential* to his view that the doctrines of religion should be preached *on* a hill, or in a valley; that the minister stands in front of a tent, or that he ministers at a certain altar; it will not be *essential* that he wear a certain vestment, or be able to trace his spiritual genealogy back to far distant times,—what he wishes to know is whether a man has experienced in his own soul what he has in his—the power of the doctrine of justification by faith in the blood of Jesus. If he has, that is enough. It is to him a question of comparatively no moment whether he thinks that

baptism by immersion is the only method ; or whether he regards John Wesley as the greatest and the best of men ; or whether he believes that all human wisdom was embodied in the Westminster Assembly of divines ; or whether he thinks that the ministry exists only in three orders. All these will be comparative trifles. The grand matter is, that the lost and guilty soul is justified by the blood of the "everlasting covenant;" and that settles every thing that is truly valuable in his view in regard to the salvation of the soul. Such a system, it is clear, must be essentially liberal. It cannot be a system which will be primarily concerned in "questions and strifes of words" about the externals of religion. It will recognise in every man, who has ever felt the efficacy of the blood of Christ, a Christian brother. It will regard all men by nature as essentially on the same level in reference to salvation. There will be, in the matter of religion, no favoured class, no holy order ; none, by nature, nearer heaven than others, and none who shall have a right to prescribe to others what they are to believe or to do. One point—one grand doctrine distinguishes them, no matter of what sect, or country, or complexion, they may be—that they are redeemed by the blood of the same Saviour. They are of the same family. They have the same rights in the kingdom of grace. No one has a right, in virtue of blood, or name, or connection with outward forms of religion, to claim a superior nearness to heaven ; nor, if the soul is justified by the blood of Jesus, has he the right or the disposition to withhold the name of Christian, or to say that a soul thus justified is left to "the uncovenanted mercies of God."

The doctrine which has been considered constitutes the peculiarity of the Protestant religion. Protestantism began in the restoration of the doctrine of justification by faith. This, more than any thing else, distinguishes the system.

All there *is* of Protestantism that is of value is in this doctrine; and all that we have of liberality in religion, and freedom from persecution, and purity of doctrine, is to be traced to this.

The whole discussion on the doctrine of justification may be closed by a personal appeal to those who may read this tract. There are but two ways conceivable on which you can be saved. One is, on the ground of your own righteousness; the other is, on the ground of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. There is no middle way conceivable. It is the grand question, then, and one in which every individual has the deepest interest, What *is* the ground of your reliance? On which of these do you depend when you think of being admitted to heaven? If you rely on the former—on your own righteousness—it must be either because you can disprove *the facts* which are charged on you as sin, or because, if the facts are undeniable, you will be able to vindicate your conduct before the bar of the Almighty. Here, then, it may be solemnly asked, whether you are willing to rest your soul's interests on such a foundation? Are you prepared to abide the issue of such a trial? Can you calmly look forward to such an investigation of your life before God's bar, and feel secure when you think of the tremendous interests of the soul that are at stake? Are you prepared to go up to meet your Maker with the feeling that your only hope there is self-vindication? It may be permitted to the writer of this tract, in view of these reasonings, and of the truths that have been suggested, and in view also of the solemn fact that he, like those whom he addresses, is soon to stand before the tribunal where all will be judged, to say, "I AM NOT. I turn to the other system which I have endeavoured to set before you. I look away from all that I have done—the miserable rags of my own righteousness—to the white robe of salvation wrought



out by my great Redeemer, and seek to wrap that robe around my guilty soul, and I feel that if justified by faith in his blood I shall be safe."

A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,  
On thy kind arms I fall ;  
Be thou my strength and righteousness,  
My Saviour and my all.

THE END.







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